

HOMESCHOOLING IN ALASKA: PARENT PERCEPTIONS AND HOMESCHOOL REGULATIONS

By

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Abstract

Homeschooling is a growing trend in the United States and Canada. States vary as to what regulations are required to homeschool a child. Current studies from the United States and Canada focus on the academic achievement of students who are homeschooled, the homeschooling styles that were used, along with education levels and income levels of those who teach at home. The studies only include students who are known to be homeschooled and do not account for the ones that are not required to participate in standardized testing. Research was conducted, first using online surveys completed by families that homeschool in Alaska, then with interviews that had more open-ended questions to allow for more detailed input. In Alaska, parents can choose to homeschool through a correspondence program or homeschool independently without having to notify the state. This research revolved around the following three questions: What does homeschooling look like for families in Alaska? What are parents' perceptions on homeschool regulations in Alaska? Why do parents choose to homeschool with a correspondence program that has more regulations than if they homeschool independently? Findings suggest that parents tend to have an eclectic approach in their teaching and student progress is measured by curriculum assessments, observation and discussion, much like is seen in a public school classroom. Parents may not fully understand the difference between homeschool regulations and regulations for correspondence programs in Alaska. Funding seems to be a top reason to enroll in a correspondence program. As the sample for this study was limited, it would be beneficial to have additional research regarding homeschooling in Alaska.

Dedication

To my husband, Anthony Cavan, who has been a constant source of support and encouragement during the challenges of graduate school and life. I am truly thankful to have you in my life.

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As a homeschool coordinator, I am grateful for AKTEACH and the Kodiak Island Borough School District for allowing me to complete my research on site and giving all families enrolled in the program an opportunity to participate in this research.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

The popularity of homeschooling is growing. In fact, the current best estimate is that there are anywhere from one and one-half million to two million children in the United States who are homeschooling (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Eleven states do not require students to be registered with the state or local school district, do not require any assessments, and have no minimum parent education in order to homeschool. Four other states require a one-time notification from families intending to homeschool, but do not require any assessments (Huseman, 2015). Because of this, it is not truly known how many children are being homeschooled, and there is no documentation on what kind of schooling they are receiving or if they are meeting relevant national and/or state standards.

1.2 Background of Study

By states not having consistent regulations, it is not guaranteed that students are being given the same opportunities for learning in different states. Previous research has looked at academic achievement of students who are homeschooled and have standardized test scores available. Existing studies suggest that homeschool students perform equal to or better on standardized tests than students in public school. However, because of the varying degrees of regulations from state to state, it is difficult to draw conclusions about academic performance and the type of schooling that leads to specific achievement results. In order to have more useful data, consistent regulations would need to be in place in all states that require the state to be notified if a student will be homeschooled, mandated to

take the same standardized tests that are required for all students in the public school, and/or provide student progress reports to the state.

For the past three and a half years, I have been a homeschool coordinator with AKTEACH, a correspondence program in the Kodiak Island Borough School District. Prior to this position, I taught in public schools for fourteen years. As a statewide homeschool coordinator, I work closely with parents who are homeschooling in Alaska and have their child or children enrolled in AKTEACH. I help create an individual learning plan for each student, look over curriculum chosen, ensure that state standards are being addressed, and monitor student progress through quarterly progress reports turned in by parents along with student work samples.

Having worked with many different families and seeing different styles of homeschooling, I began to look into current research regarding homeschooling as well as regulations for homeschooling in the United States, looking closer at Alaska specifically.

1.3 Purpose of Study

There are little to no regulations on homeschooling or homeschool teachers in Alaska. When looking at public education in Alaska, there are standards that educators, schools, and administrators must meet. Educators need to have at least a Bachelor's degree from an accredited university, must obtain a teaching certificate from the state, and they must maintain that certificate by completing six professional development credits in order to renew the license. Alaska does not have this regulation or requirement for parents who want to homeschool their child. What does homeschooling look like in Alaska?

Should the state or federal government intervene and place stricter guidelines or regulations on homeschooling to ensure that the students are getting a well-rounded education? Yuracko states that Alaska is “one of the most explicitly hands-off states in regards to homeschooling” (Yuracko, 2008, p. 130). The only regulation on homeschooling in Alaska, AS 14.30.010 (b) (12), is that the student is exempt from the compulsory attendance law. Yuracko goes on to say that “homeschooling of virtually any sort is legal under Alaska law. In short, oversight of homeschooling in several states is so lax as to be nonexistent” (Yuracko, 2008, p. 130). It is important to note that homeschool students who are enrolled in a correspondence program in Alaska have additional regulations to follow.

If there is no oversight of homeschooling in a state, then I do not know what curriculum is being taught. With no one investigating the curriculum, I do not know if the students will be meeting the standards that have been adopted by each state, nor do I know if any curriculum is even being used.

There is very little, if any, research on homeschooling in Alaska. As homeschool continues to grow in popularity each year, this is a topic that needs to be examined. The purpose of this study was to determine what homeschooling looks like in Alaska and what perceptions parents in Alaska have on regulations on homeschooling.

1.4 Research Questions

- 1) What does homeschooling look like for families in Alaska?
- 2) What are parents' perceptions on homeschool regulations in Alaska?
- 3) Why do parents choose to homeschool with a correspondence program that has more regulations in place than if they homeschool independently?

1.5 Significance of Study

There has been little research regarding homeschooling in Alaska. Research that has been performed was based on students who have participated in summative assessments required by the state. Research is severely lacking regarding parent perceptions and what homeschooling looks like for families in Alaska. This study helps to fill this gap in research.

There is a great deal of personal significance in researching this topic. I am in my eighteenth year in the field of education. Unlike many educators, my experience is not from a typical classroom. I have worked with many different grade levels, from early intervention (birth to three years) through the eighth grade. My position with early intervention required me to work more directly with the parents while also working with their child. This position also required me to work cooperatively with Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, and Speech Language Pathologists in order for me to be able to deliver therapy when I visited the family. My education experience has also ranged from single grade classrooms to multi-grade classrooms, working in a typical public school, to schools that work with students in crisis or special needs that are not able to achieve in the public school.

In 2013, all of this experience made way for my position as Statewide Homeschool Coordinator at AKTEACH in the Kodiak Island Borough School District. My background individualizing students' learning made it an easy transition to work with families in creating an individualized program for their child or children.

I have seen many different homeschool styles over the past few years and examined a large volume of different curriculum for kindergarten through eighth grade. I have seen students blossom with homeschooling that I am sure would have had a different

experience in the public schools because of various situations. It is from my experience as a homeschool coordinator that caused me to question what homeschool looks like in Alaska as a whole, not just what I am seeing within AKTEACH. This study helps fill the gap in research regarding homeschooling in Alaska, specifically in the Kodiak Island region, and parent perceptions on regulations.

I have found that parents are often concerned about attaching their names to anything that is about homeschooling and feel that the information or data will be used for purposes they do not approve of. Hopefully as more studies emerge, the topic of homeschooling will be more widely accepted, and parents will be more apt to want to participate and be heard.

1.6 Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined in relation to their use and significance in this study. It is also important to know the difference between the various homeschool pedagogy and styles when examining this study.

Charlotte Mason Approach – This approach is based on the British educator Charlotte Mason (1842-1923), whose life goal was to improve the quality of the education of children. She believed that the whole child needs to be educated, not just the mind. Students learn from their surrounding or “atmosphere,” they need to learn good habits or “discipline,” and students should learn through “life” with living thoughts and ideas instead of dry facts. There is an underlying belief that students deserve to be respected and they learn best from real-life situations. Children are given time to play, create, and be involved

in real-life situations from which they can learn. Students take nature walks, visit art museums, and learn geography, history, and literature from "living books." Living books are usually written in a narrative or story from one author who is passionate about the topic. Students also show what they know, not by taking tests, but via narration and discussion ("What is the," n.d.; "The different ways," n.d.).

Classical Education Approach – This approach has been around at least since the middle ages. It focuses on three stages of learning: 1) grammar stage, 2) logic stage, and 3) rhetoric stage. The grammar stage is the first years of learning, commonly thought of as first through fourth grade. This involves rote learning or memorization of facts, such as phonics and spelling rules, grammar rules, and math facts. The logic stage is considered when the student starts thinking analytically and asking "why?" Rhetoric is considered the last stage of learning. The student applies the rules of logic to the foundational rules or information learned and is able to produce expressions with clear, dynamic, and well-designed language (Wise Bauer, 2009).

Correspondence Program – A program that may offer distance classes or coursework and/or have homeschool students enrolled with a certified teacher assigned to work with the family and oversee the progress of the student. These programs must follow Alaska State Statutes and receive partial funding (90% of the Average Daily Membership) from the state for the enrollment. Through the Alaska Statutes regarding correspondence programs, AS 14.03.300, AS 14.03.123, AS 14.03.320, and AS 14.03.090, homeschool students enrolled in a correspondence program receive public funds through a student allotment, are

required to create an individual learning plan, are required to take the state assessment, and must use curriculum not dedicated to one religion (Alaska State Legislature, 2016a, 2016b).

Eclectic or “Relaxed Homeschooling” Approach – In this approach, curriculum is chosen from more than one source. Workbooks may be used for math, reading, and spelling, but may use more of an unschooling approach for the other subjects. The mornings of their school time is usually more structured or formal, but the afternoons more informal with projects, field trips, or hobbies. The advantage of this method is that the parent feels that the subjects they believe are most important are covered thoroughly. This method also allows the family to choose textbooks, field trips, and classes that fit their needs and interests (“The different ways,” n.d.).

Homeschool – Student learning is facilitated by an adult at home and/or in the community. Student does not attend a local public or private school full-time (Ray, 2016a).

Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) – founded in March 1983 by Mike Farris and Mike Smith, both of whom are attorneys and homeschooling dads. It is a nonprofit advocacy organization established to defend parents and their right to direct the education of their child or children. HSLDA provides homeschooling-related legal advice and representation to its members and promotes homeschool-friendly legislation at the state and federal levels (Home School Legal Defense Association, n.d.-a, n.d.-b).

Independent Homeschool – Student receives his or her schooling at home and/or in the community. The student is not enrolled or a part of a correspondence program or school district in Alaska and does not receive public funds for their education.

Individual Learning Plan (ILP) – An ILP is required if a student is enrolled in correspondence program in the state of Alaska per AS 14.03.300. This education plan is developed in collaboration with the student, parent or guardian of the student, a certified teacher assigned to the student, and other individuals involved in the student's learning plan. The ILP lists each subject, curriculum used, topics that will be covered, goals or standards that will be met, what will be used to grade and the type of grading system that will be used. The ILP also identifies who the certified teacher is that will be overseeing the course, and how long of a course it will be (e.g., full year, semester) (Alaska State Legislature, 2016a, 2016b).

National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI) – Founded in 1990 by Brian D. Ray, Ph.D, as a private non-profit research organization. It conducts research regarding homeschooling, and is a clearinghouse of the research for the public (National Home Education Research Institute, n.d.).

Standards Based Assessment (SBA) – The SBA was a statewide standardized assessment in Alaska and is based on Alaska state standards. It was administered to students in grades three through ten for Reading, Writing, and Math. It was also given to students in grades four, eight and ten for Science. The SBA replaced the former

Benchmarks in 2005 and was used for Reading, Writing, and Math through 2014. It was used for Science from 2005 through 2015 (Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, n.d.).

School-at-Home Approach – Families that use this approach usually purchase a boxed curriculum that comes with textbooks, study schedules, grades, and record keeping. This approach looks more like traditional school, just done at home (“The different ways,” n.d.).

Student Allotment – According to AS 14.03.320, Alaska students receive a yearly allotment if enrolled through a correspondence study program where a certified teacher assists with the development of an Individual Learning Plan and monitors student progress quarterly throughout the school year. This money is used to meet the instructional needs for the student and is also monitored by the certified teacher. It can be used to purchase curriculum, individual lessons (e.g., dance, piano, swim, karate, etc.), courses, and general supplies that directly relate to the student’s ILP (Alaska State Legislature, 2016a, 2016b).

Structured Homeschooling – One of two styles of homeschooling. Structured homeschooling involves having clear educational goals for the students, structured lessons with curriculum purchased, use of self-made lesson plans, or possibly a mixture of purchased and self-made plans (Martin-Chang et al., 2011; Dewar, 2011).

Unschooling Approach – This is also known as natural, interest-led, and child-led learning. Students learn from everyday life experiences and do not use school schedules or formal lessons. Students do not usually study, take tests, or memorize things. Instead, unschooled children follow their interests and learn in much the same way as adults do—by pursuing an interest or curiosity (“The different ways,” n.d.; Stevens, 1994).

Unstructured Homeschooling – One of two styles of homeschooling. Most often the unschooling pedagogical approach is used with this style of homeschooling. Unstructured homeschooling involves students having natural consequences in their day-to-day activities. Purchased curriculum or lesson plans are not typically used with this style (Martin-Chang et al., 2011; Dewar, 2011).

Unit Studies Approach – This approach uses your child's interest and then ties that interest into subject areas like math, reading, spelling, science, art, and history. It is interdisciplinary studies around a theme or topic. For instance, a student might have a unit about Egypt, and he or she would read books and write stories about Egypt, do art projects about pyramids, and learn about Egyptian artifacts and history or use mapping skills to map out a catacomb (Ellis, 2012).

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

2.1 Overview

Homeschooling or schooling at home is when a child is educated by an adult, usually the parent, at home. This kind of education can be seen around the world and has continued to grow in popularity in the United States as seen by the increase in homeschool students by the National Center for Education Statistics. This chapter reviews the nature of homeschooling by exploring the history of homeschooling, demographics of families that homeschool, student achievement in homeschooling, state regulations on homeschooling, and homeschooling in Alaska.

2.2 History of Homeschooling

Teaching children at home is not a new concept. It was often a necessity in early American history. Covey and Covey state that education was primarily the choice or right of the parents within the colonies and “consisted mainly of learning to read the religious literature and to learn the appropriate amounts of arithmetic in order for children to assume a vocation” (Covey and Covey, 2001 p. 25). It was not until the 1800’s that schools started appearing in towns in the United States.

In 1852, Massachusetts became the first state to pass an education law, requiring parents of a child age eight to fourteen to send them to a public school within the town or city they reside in for at least twelve weeks in a year, with six weeks being consecutive (Grocke, n.d.). Compulsory education began to follow in other states throughout the years. By 1889, Massachusetts amended the law to note that a student otherwise instructed for a like period of time in the “branches of learning.”

In the 1960's and 1970's, homeschooling gained favor and was re-popularized. This was in response to religious fundamentalists and experimental unschoolers that had the perception that the public school educational system was inadequate (Snyder, 2013).

Homeschool became more prevalent in the 1980's. Gaither attributes the growth of the homeschool population to families feeling more alienated, and that with the growing size of public schools, their children's education was less personal with less cultural variations (Gaither, 2008).

Homeschooling was still illegal in thirty states in 1980 due to the compulsory education laws. In 1992, homeschooling became legal in all fifty states (Somerville, 2001; Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011). Homeschool has only continued to grow and seems to be more popular today than in the past. Curriculum companies now cater to homeschool, offering curriculum designed with one-on-one instruction in mind. Homeschool co-ops are found within towns or cities where families come together to offer different classes that may be one parent's strength so that it allows all to have flexibility and courses that are in the child's interest.

2.3 Demographics of Homeschool Families

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) estimates that in 2012 there were anywhere from one and one-half million to two million students who were homeschooled, age five to seventeen and in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade. This is an increase from the estimated one million, one-hundred thousand in 2003 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). However, Ray (2016a) believes that there are about 2.3 million students who are being educated at home in the United States.

According to Ray, homeschool families vary demographically, including “atheists, Christians, and Mormons; conservatives, libertarians; low-, middle-, and high-income families; black, Hispanic, and white; parents with Ph.D.s, GEDs, and no high-school diplomas” (Ray, 2016a p. 1).

The NCES states that more than half of the estimated homeschool population in the United States is Caucasian, and the parents have some training above a high school diploma that includes vocational/trade school or some college. It is also noted that only about one-fifth of the population has a poverty status of poor. Table 2.1 shows the distribution of demographics by the NCES. The NCES recommends looking at the unadjusted estimates as “the subgroup samples sizes for homeschooled students’ demographics are small, and may be distorted by any potential bias in the adjusted estimates” (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 8).

The estimates shown in Table 2.1 are consistent with the population of students enrolled in the correspondence program that I currently work at as a homeschool coordinator, AKTEACH. Families enrolled for the 2016-2017 school year have three-fifths of the population that identify as Caucasian. However, one noticeable difference is that NCES does not have a specific category for Alaska Native or American Indian, instead they are a part of the group “other” because their sample sizes did not warrant firm estimates. Alaska Native students make up approximately 18% of the population with AKTEACH Families for the 2016-2017 school year.

Table 2.1. Distribution of homeschooled students ages 5 through 17 in the U.S. in 2012

Characteristic	Statistically Adjusted		Unadjusted	
	Percentage distribution	Homeschooling rate	Percentage distribution	Homeschooling rate
Locale of student's household¹				
City	28	3.2	21	1.5
Suburban	34	3.1	28	1.6
Town	7	2.7	10	2.3
Rural	31	4.5	41	3.6
Student's sex				
Male	49	3.3	46	1.9
Female	51	3.6	54	2.3
Student's race/ethnicity				
White, non-Hispanic	68	4.5	83	3.3
Black, non-Hispanic	8	1.9	5 !	0.7 !
Hispanic	15	2.3	7	0.6
Asian or Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic	4	2.6	2 !	0.6 !
Other, non-Hispanic ²	5	3.2	4	1.7
Student's grade equivalent				
Kindergarten–2nd grade	23	3.1	18	1.4
3rd–5th grade	23	3.4	22	1.9
6th–8th grade	24	3.5	29	2.6
9th–12th grade	29	3.7	32	2.5
Parents' highest education level				
Less than high school	11	3.4	2 !	0.4 !
High school graduate or equivalent	20	3.4	23	2.3
Vocational/technical or some college	30	3.4	32	2.2
Bachelor's degree	25	3.7	26	2.4
Graduate or professional school	14	3.3	18	2.5
Poverty status³				
Poor	20	3.5	11	1.2
Nonpoor	80	3.4	89	2.3

! Interpret data with caution; coefficient of variation is between 30 and 50 percent.

¹ Locale of student's household classifies the residential ZIP code into a set of four major locale categories: city, suburban, town, rural.

² "Other, non-Hispanic" includes children who were multiracial and not of Hispanic ethnicity, or who were American Indian or Alaska Native, or who were not Hispanic, White, Black, Asian, or Pacific Islander. The different groups mentioned here are not shown separately because the sample sizes do not support stable estimates.

³ Students are considered poor if they were living in households with incomes below the poverty threshold. Income is collected in categories in the survey, rather than as an exact amount, and therefore the poverty measures used in this report are approximations of poverty.

NOTE: Homeschooled students are school-age children who receive instruction at home instead of at a public or private school either all or most of the time. Excludes students who were enrolled in public or private school more than 25 hours per week and students who were homeschooled primarily because of temporary illness. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. For more information about the adjusted rate, see technical notes.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES), 2012.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2016). Homeschooling in the United States: 2012. Retrieved January 20, 2017.

Martin-Chang, et al., (2011) noted in a study comparing homeschool students to public school students in Canada that there were clearly two distinct subgroups in homeschool, structured and unstructured. They found that the mode and median income for families in the unstructured homeschooled group was in the \$20,000 to \$40,000 range, whereas the mode and median income for the families in the structured homeschooled group was in the \$40,000 to \$60,000 range. If the unstructured homeschooled students are being taught by families that are in the low-income range, then one has to assume that they are more than likely not college educated. As the data from Martin-Chang et al., (2011) showed, this group was the lowest performing in the standardized tests. One must question if homeschool parents should be held to the same standard as public school teachers.

2.4 Reasons for Homeschooling

There are many facets to homeschooling that people may not know. The motivations for homeschooling vary between individuals as to why they elect to homeschool. To explore homeschooling and its success, it is important to point out where homeschooling originated and the reasons why parents choose homeschooling instead of attending public school. By gathering facts or data from those who homeschool, it provides a better understanding and awareness to the purpose and function of homeschooling (Martin-Chang et al., 2011).

Somerville, (2001) notes that the Florida Department of Education used to ask families why they chose to homeschool their child. The primary reason was religious or moral concerns until 1993, when dissatisfaction with the public schools became the leading motivation for homeschooling.

The NCES also gathered data on the motives for families that have chosen to homeschool, as seen in Table 2.2. Parents were asked first to indicate each reason that was important in their decision to homeschool, choosing as many as they saw fit. A follow-up question required parents to choose those answers that were most important in their decision to homeschool. It is noted that a concern about the safety of their child is the highest-ranked motive for homeschooling in 2012. Religious reasons used to be what others thought the leading motivation was to homeschool. It now shows as being ranked fourth, with only 17% saying this was most important.

Table 2.2 Parent Motivations: Percentage of school age children in the U.S. in 2012

Reason	Important ¹ Percent	Most Important Percent
A desire to provide religious instruction	64	17
A desire to provide moral instruction	77	5
A concern about the environment of other schools, such as safety, drugs, or negative peer pressure	91	25
A dissatisfaction with the academic instruction at other schools	74	19
A desire to provide a nontraditional approach to child's education	44	5 †
Child has other special needs	16	‡
Child has a physical or mental health problem	15	5
Other reasons ²	37	21

‡ Reporting standards not met. The coefficient of variation for this estimate is 50 percent or greater.

† Interpret data with caution; coefficient of variation is between 30 and 50 percent.

¹ Respondents were instructed to mark all that apply for the "Important" item but could only choose one as "Most important."

² Parents homeschool their children for many reasons that are often unique to their family situation. "Other reasons" parents gave for homeschooling include family time, finances, travel, and distance.

NOTE: Homeschooled students are school-age children who receive instruction at home instead of at a public or private school either all or most of the time. Excludes students who were enrolled in public or private school more than 25 hours per week and students who were homeschooled primarily because of temporary illness.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES), 2012.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2016). Homeschooling in the United States: 2012. Retrieved January 20, 2017.

Parents usually have more than one reason for homeschooling their child or children. Ray (2016a) remarks a few other reasons that NCES noted:

- Parents or families may choose to homeschool because they have a different approach than typically in public schools.
- Homeschooling will enhance family relationships between children and parents as well as other siblings.
- Parents can provide guided social interactions with their peers and adults.

Parents desire to use religious instruction is not noted as one of the most common reasons families are choosing to homeschool in the United States (Ray, 2016a). It is debatable if parents chose moral instruction to also be religious in nature. From my experience with homeschool families, moral instruction is separate from their religious studies and is not necessarily taught through religious stories.

2.5 Homeschooling Styles

Martin-Chang et al., (2011) discovered that there were clearly two distinct subgroups in the homeschool population they were comparing to public school: structured and non-structured. The structured group was comprised of parents who identified with the role of a teacher. The unstructured group was comprised of parents who identified with the view that education was gained via the natural consequences of the child's day to day activities.

According to the Homeschool Learning Network (n.d.), structured homeschooling, often considered the traditional approach, usually follows a curriculum or scope and

sequence of the curriculum. This is the knowledge of what will be taught and how it is divided up. Structured homeschool families usually have a set amount of time, or minimal time that they will use for schooling. The parents often use curriculum that includes a teaching guide with more information as to what will be studied or worked on each day.

According to Morrison (2007), unstructured homeschool groups embrace no set curriculum and do not require students to study particular subjects at a fixed age. They allow the child to set the curriculum by studying what is interesting to him/her. Students learn at their own pace, and this kind of schooling makes it unlikely that the student will be unmotivated. She also notes that the curriculum in this model touches on virtually all traditional academic areas, but in a less fragmented way than in traditional schools.

McReynolds also found that “some homeschooled children follow a traditional curriculum and a set schedule, some are ‘deschooled,’ a style of homeschooling that permits children to follow their own interests at their own pace” (McReynolds, 2007, p. 36). However, as Faulconer (n.d.-a, n.d.-b) notes, deschooling is usually described as the process or transition from school to homeschool, but it can lead to unschooling, which is the approach where the child’s education is based on the interest of that child.

Neal has a different point a view, noting that though structure matters, it does vary by family and that students are not only homeschooled in the home. “Homeschoolers take field trips and visit museums and libraries. They network with other homeschool families. They use books and curricula that reflect their own academic and religious values, yet align closely enough to state academic standards that students are prepared for standardized tests, which some states require” (Neal, 2006, p. 55).

2.6 Pedagogical Approaches to Homeschooling

In education, there are many different philosophies or pedagogical approaches that a teacher may have. Likewise, in homeschool, there are different philosophies or approaches that parents develop.

Sanders (2010) notes that there are at least five different approaches to homeschooling: (1) Charlotte Mason, (2) Classical and (3) Unit Studies would all be considered a 'structured homeschooling,' whereas (4) Unschooling, and (5) Eclectic or "Relaxed Homeschooling" would be considered as unstructured homeschooling based on the definitions of these approaches.

In my experience as a homeschool coordinator, I would have to disagree that if a family has an eclectic approach to homeschooling that they should be considered as being unstructured as a whole. Many of the families that I work with choose to use a variety of sources and methods, that fall under the umbrella of "eclectic." However, many have very structured times or subjects.

Depending where you search, the number of homeschool approaches varies. Other possible approaches include school-at-home, the Waldorf method, Montessori, multiple intelligences, dvd/video schooling, and internet homeschooling which include online courses or correspondence courses ("Homeschooling Approaches," n.d.).

Teachers tend to pull from various approaches and develop their own philosophy of teaching throughout their years of experiences. I have seen this to be true for homeschool families as well. The parents seem to be able to express their style or approach to homeschooling the longer they have been teaching at home.

2.7 Student Achievement in Homeschool Students

Multiple studies say that homeschool students in the United States perform as well as or above their peers in the public schools. (Ray, 2016a, 2016b; Snyder, 2013; Cogan, 2010; Ray, 2010; Ray, 2009; Slatter, 2009; Ray & Eagleson, 2008; Richman, 2005, Academic Statistics on Homeschooling, 2004; Cai, Reeve and Robinson, 2002; Rudner, 1999). Ray states, “In repeated studies, home-educated students typically score at the 65th to 80th percentile on nationally normed standardized achievement tests” (Ray, 2009, p.2). Ray also notes that public school students average is only at the 50th percentile (Ray, 2009).

However, it is important to keep in mind that academic achievement among homeschooled students in the U.S. is difficult to assess due to many factors. As McReynolds states, “There is no uniform curriculum; standardized tests are voluntary in many states; and federal systems of ‘accountability’ are absent. Nevertheless, a variety of studies suggest that by traditional standards, homeschoolers do pretty well” (McReynolds, 2007, p. 36; Richman, 2005; King, 2004; Golden, 2000; Richman, 1999; Rudner, 1999).

Is the education level of the parents important to student achievement in homeschools? Ensign (2000) completed a nine-year longitudinal study of 100 homeschooled students who represent regular and special education categories. The parents’ educational background ranged from two years of community college to a master’s degree. All respondents with students with learning disabilities reported that they watch their own child with learning disabilities to see what works and what does not. “Projecting from the data so far on their study skills, reading and math skills, and academic coping skills, I expect all of these students to graduate and many to continue with postsecondary education” (Ensign, 2000, p. 151). She compares students who are homeschooled to

students in special education in public schools and notes that it raises serious questions about the stereotypes that influence current practices in special education.

Furthermore, Ray declares that these recurring studies “show that home-educated students generally score above average regardless of whether either parent has ever held a state-issued teaching certificate. While nearly all public school teachers have government teaching certificates and only about ten percent of homeschool parents have ever had such certificates, homeschool students consistently outperform public school students” (Ray, 2009, p. 3).

How is student achievement affected by the approach that a parent uses when homeschooling? Martin-Chang et al., (2011) examined the impact of schooling on academic achievement. Thirty-seven public school students and thirty-seven homeschool were assessed with the seven subtests of the Woodcock-Johnson under the same conditions. It was noted that twelve of the thirty-seven homeschool students were unstructured and twenty-five were structured. The structured homeschooled students achieved higher standardized scores compared to the students attending public school. However, the unstructured homeschooled students achieved the lowest standardized scores compared to the structured homeschool group and public school students.

Ray states that “There is no correlation between the degree of state regulation or control of homeschooling and homeschooling students’ achievement” (Ray, 2009, p. 3). In fact, Ray notes that student achievement for homeschooled students is consistent and above the public school average, regardless if they are in a state with high or low regulations (Ray, 2009).

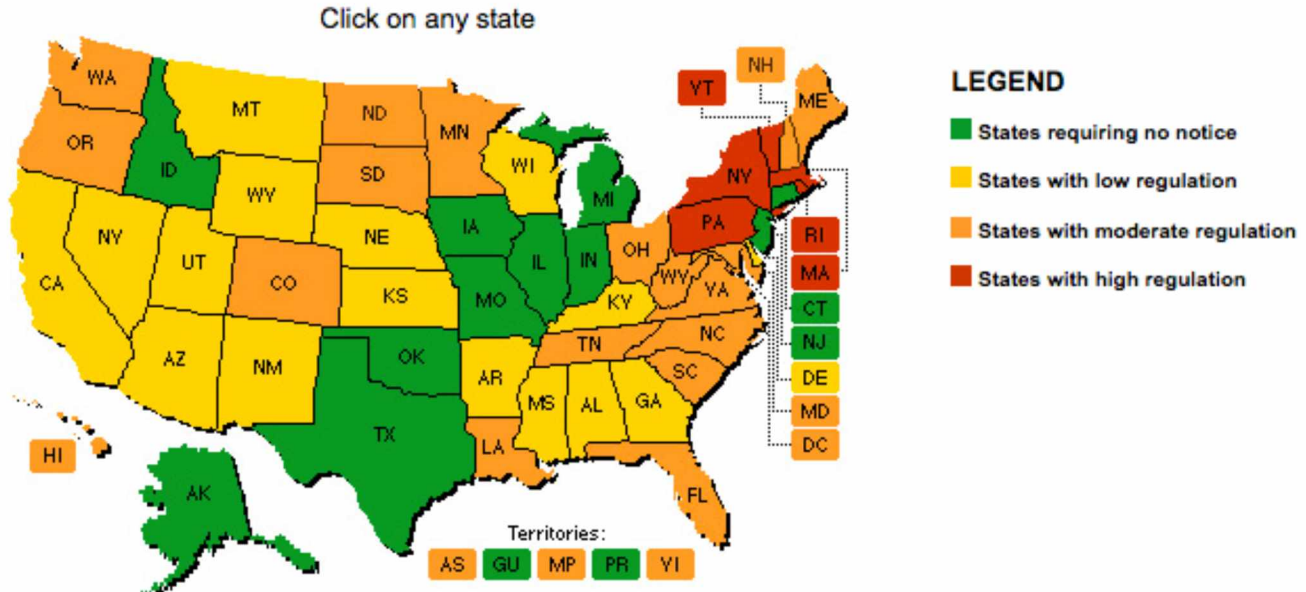
Though there are many studies on academic achievement of homeschooled students, research that I have found does not include as much diversity that is seen in public schools, including but not limited to: students with special needs, English language learners (ELL), students from areas that safety plays a factor in their everyday life, or students with poverty status.

2.8 State Regulations for Homeschooling

Education in the United States has often been considered a private matter and has been a point of contention with families that wish to homeschool. Ray (2009) notes that there is no research that supports government needing to regulate homeschooling. However, as homeschool has become a more popular choice in education, states have created laws to help govern or regulate homeschooling. The federal government has not regulated homeschooling, resulting in differences between the states.

When states began to set regulations on homeschooling, there was a need for legal recourse, and the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) was founded in 1983 by two attorneys and homeschooling fathers. The HSLDA's mission "is to protect the rights of the parents to direct the education of their children and protect families' freedom" (Home School Legal Defense Association, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). However, according to Huseman (2015), HSLDA's members represent about fifteen percent of the nation's estimate of homeschooled children.

The HSLDA notes the differences between the states in regulations. Figure 2.1 illustrates the different levels of regulation in regards to parents notifying the state if they intent to homeschool.



Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) (n.d.-c). Retrieved January 20, 2017 from <https://www.hslda.org/laws/>

Figure 2.1: State Regulation on Homeschooling Requirements

Stewart and Neeley (2005) investigated home schooling provisions in each state. They questioned if home school enrollments were directly related to the strength of the regulatory provisions governing homeschooling, and if there was a discrepancy between the census data of school-age population and current enrollments of public, private, and home school students in the United States. “The homeschool population was more challenging to determine because only 19 of the 50 U.S. states collected home school enrollments for the year 2000” (Stewart & Neeley, 2005, p. 356). Results from the study concluded that regulations governing homeschool across America were inconsistent. Accountability is not increasing for homeschool education, and the discrepancies of school-

age population statistics are a possible result of poor reporting, non-reporting, and children not attending any school.

Glanzer (2008) states that the state should require registration with local educational authorities. The burden of proof that the homeschool will satisfy the state's and child's interest must rest on the parents. The state must ensure that the school environment provides exposure to and engagement with values and beliefs other than the child's parents, and the state should require multicultural curricula to provide such exposure and engagement.

Contrary to some beliefs, Ray explains that "Home-educated students whose parents are high school graduates (with no additional formal education) are scoring well above the national average on achievement tests. On the other hand, public school students with similarly educated parents score below the national average" (Ray, 2009, p. 3).

Martin-Chang et al., (2011) shows that there are different levels of efficiency in homeschool educators, just as there is in the public school system. If it is important to "use evaluation as means to differentiate between struggling, novice and exceptional teachers, and to encourage and support appropriate professional growth" (Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, 2013, p. 1), then wouldn't this include home educators?

One must also remember that twenty-eight states, including Alaska, do not require homeschool students to take the standardized state assessment (Huseman, 2015). If students in public school are mandated or required to take standardized tests, why is this not true for all homeschooled students? Shouldn't they too need to show their proficiency in the core subjects? However, in order for states to require or mandate that homeschool

students take these standardized tests, students must first be required to register with the state or local district so states know who is homeschooling.

2.9 Homeschooling in Alaska

Homeschool seems to be very popular in the state of Alaska. According to McKittrick, Alaska's homeschooling rate is three times the national rate, with "more than 11,000 Alaskan children, some nine percent of the school-age population, are signed up with one of the state's thirty official homeschool programs. That's a minimum number, not counting the families who homeschool independently" (McKittrick, 2016).

Families in Alaska have many options for education. Alaska is one of the least regulated states on homeschooling (Huseman, 2015; Yuracko, 2008). According to Alaska Statute §14.30.010(b)(12), "Children schooled at home by their parents or guardians are exempt from the Compulsory School Attendance Law. Parents are not required to register with the state or their local school district, and no testing or other requirements are placed on home schools not funded with public dollars" (Alaska State Legislature, 2016a, 2016b). This provision was added in 1997 (Hanlon, 2016).

Hanlon notes, "How Alaska handles home schooling has attracted both support and skepticism. Those in favor say the law successfully upholds a parent's fundamental right to educate their children, but critics argue there needs to be some form of oversight" (Hanlon, 2016).

Parents are not required to notify Alaska that they plan to homeschool. There is no requirement to take the state standardized assessments or a minimum education level for parents. However, if parents wish to receive funding from the state, they can enroll their

child in an Alaskan correspondence program. If enrolled in a correspondence program, the student receives a student allotment to cover expenses directly relating the education of their child or children, but there are additional state regulations (Hanlon, 2016).

Student achievement in Alaska has been measured by how students scored on the Standards Based Assessments (SBA) from 2005–2015. In 2012, the Alaska State Board of Education and Early Development adopted new regulations for educator evaluations. Alaska Statute 4 AAC 19.010, outlines that teacher evaluations will include student achievement beginning no later than the 2015-2016 school year (Alaska State Legislature, 2016b). According to the State of Alaska, “quantitative measure of student learning needed to be added to the districts’ systems to provide a more complete picture of the level of effectiveness of the teachers and administrators in Alaska” (Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, 2013, p. 1).

Homeschool families may choose to enroll with a correspondence program in Alaska and receive funding through an allotment for curriculum, lessons, and supplies that directly relate to the child’s individual learning plan (ILP). If enrolled in a correspondence program, they are held to additional Alaska Statutes, 4 AAC 09.040, 4 AAC 09.160 and 4 AAC 33.405-490, that require an ILP, monthly contact, quarterly progress reports, and a certified teacher overseeing the student’s progress (Alaska State Legislature, 2016b).

2.10 Conclusion

The popularity of homeschool has continued to grow over the years, and the motivation to homeschool has also changed within the last thirty years. What once was a family’s religious or moral value choice to homeschool has now become a multi-layered

motive to educate their child at home (Ray, 2016a; U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

There is a lack of research regarding homeschooling in Alaska, regulations on homeschooling generally, and Alaska specific regulations. There is also a shortage of research that examines parent perceptions on homeschool regulations in the state of Alaska. This study investigates what homeschooling looks like in Alaska and parent perceptions on regulations regarding homeschooling in Alaska.

Chapter 3: Methods

In conducting this study, my intent was to examine the perceptions of parents who homeschool in Alaska. Findings from this study may be helpful in understanding why students are homeschooled, parents' perceptions to state regulations on homeschooling, and what homeschooling looks like for families in Alaska.

Sequential explanatory mixed method design was used in this research to investigate what homeschooling looks like in Alaska (Creswell, 2012; Creswell, 2003). First, a survey of homeschooling parents was used to gather a wide range of information. Second, in order to have an understanding of parents' perceptions, I needed to be able to hear their voices. For this reason, it was decided that it was important to have not only the survey, but also interviews of parents who homeschool in Alaska. Surveys give an insight to parents' perceptions, but also what their homeschooling involves (e.g. curriculum, philosophies, tracking progress). Interviews allowed for a more in depth view of parents' opinions and answers that may not have been an option on the survey. Student achievement was examined with this study, using SBA scores, which were the most accessible. However, these data were only used to gain context and was not intended as the focus of this study.

3.1 Participants

To be considered for this study, participants had to be homeschooling at least one child in Alaska for the 2015-2016 school year. Participants could be homeschooling independently or could be homeschooling through an Alaskan correspondence program.

Specifically, families with homeschool students enrolled in Alaskans Transforming Educational Access within Community and Homes (AKTEACH), a statewide correspondence school based out of Kodiak, Alaska, were directly emailed information about the research and opportunity to participate in the survey and interviews. This program was chosen as I am a certified teacher and statewide homeschool coordinator for this program and received permission from the school district to conduct the research. A link was provided for parents to complete the online survey that included contact information for those interested in participating in the interviews.

Facebook was utilized to reach homeschool families who were enrolled with other correspondence programs or homeschooling independently. The information about the research and opportunity to participate was posted in the Kodiak Homeschool Club, Alaskan Homeschooling, and Mat-Su Homeschoolers on Facebook.

3.2 Setting

There were two settings within this study. The online component of the anonymous survey and the interview component, which was done at the AKTEACH Homeschool Office in Kodiak, Alaska.

3.3 Limitations

Members from three different closed Facebook groups were invited to participate in the study. Parents with at least one child enrolled with AKTEACH were also invited to participate in the study. There were 44 families in the AKTEACH correspondence program with students in kindergarten through eighth grade at the time of this study, and they were

located across the state of Alaska. One Facebook group had 697 members from all over Alaska. Another Facebook group had 641 members within the Matanuska-Susitna Valley. The third Facebook group had 164 members in the Kodiak area. However, 217 people were members in two of these groups, so the total number of possible participants could have been 1,285 members from the Facebook groups.

Those invited to participate did not include homeschooling families who are not members of these Facebook groups, therefore not all areas of the state were represented in the study. Data may not be an accurate representation of all perceptions of parents who homeschool across the state of Alaska.

There was a total of 32 participants in the online survey, but because of the anonymity, it is unknown how many were outside of the Kodiak area and how many were AKTEACH families. I felt it was important for parents to have anonymity so they would be more free to share their opinions and not worried about extra data being collected on them.

As previously stated, all interview participants were families who live in the Kodiak area, which includes more remote areas than the city of Kodiak. Seven participants had a child enrolled in AKTEACH, one participant had a child enrolled in another correspondence program, and one participant homeschooled independently. Interviews were held at the AKTEACH office in Kodiak, which could have limitations for families not enrolled with AKTEACH.

The low response rate, as well as the location of participants affects how well the data represents the entire homeschool population in Alaska for both the online survey and

interview. The majority of participants in both settings were also enrolled in AKTEACH, which isn't true of the entire Alaska homeschool population.

The SBA was chosen because there were not enough years of data with the Alaska Measures of Progress (AMP). Because of this, the students' scores are not necessarily from the same families as those that participated in this study.

3.3.1 Statement of Bias

All researchers try to avoid bias. However, it is in our nature to have bias in some way. Homeschool is a controversial topic within the field of education. I was unaware of the statutes or regulations in Alaska until I was hired as a homeschool coordinator with the Kodiak Island Borough School District. My point of view on homeschooling was also different when I was first hired than what it is today. If I was not in this position, I do not believe my outlook would be the same, and as such, my interest in the topic wouldn't have been as compelling as it is today. I do not believe I would have asked all of the questions that were created for the survey or interview because my knowledge in the subject was limited before becoming a homeschool coordinator.

My relationship with the families I work with aided in participants being willing to join the study. They trusted my intent and were willing to share their opinions with me because of that trust. This is evident in the interview participants, as the majority of them have students enrolled in AKTEACH, and I am the certified teacher that is assigned to them. This has also caused the study to have a bias towards families that homeschool independently by not having a proportionate number of each group within the research.

3.4 Delimitations

Parents who homeschool often comment that they feel like they don't approve of the data collected on their children or themselves. Because of this, it can be difficult to get participation or complete answers to questions when their name is attached. This is the reason that the online surveys were anonymous. Interviews were used for those willing to participate, but it was reiterated that their names would be kept confidential. Names were not documented during the audio recordings of the interviews. The audio recordings were kept on my personal, password-protected computer.

3.5 Assumptions

In conducting the surveys, it was assumed that all participants could read and understand English at an eighth-grade level. A survey at this reading level was constructed for this study, as there was no known existing survey on Alaska homeschoolers' perceptions.

It was necessary to assume that all participants were honest in reporting their feelings and ideas regarding homeschooling. To encourage honesty, parents were reminded that their responses would be confidential and not shared with anyone. The survey was administered using Survey Monkey, no IP addresses were collected, and the responses were anonymous.

3.6 Instrumentation

3.6.1 Survey

A survey was created, to gain insight into why and how families homeschool in Alaska. Twelve questions focused on reasons and benefits for homeschooling, parents' perceptions on Alaska homeschool regulations, assessments, challenges of homeschooling, and following progress of students. There were four different kinds of questions on the survey. Three questions were dichotomous and allowed for follow up short response. Four questions were multiple choice that allowed multiple answers and a comment box to elaborate. Four questions were opened-ended questions, and one question was multiple-choice, allowing only one answer. The survey allows for insight to what kind of teaching philosophy is used, how curriculum is chosen, if students are enrolled in a correspondence program that has additional regulations, how progress is measured, and if the parents and/or child find value in summative assessments such as Alaska Standards Based Assessment (SBA) or Alaska Measures of Progress (AMP). For the full survey, see Appendix C.

3.6.2 Interviews

Interview questions were created to have participants expand on information that was collected from online surveys. Participants scheduled a time that worked for them, preparing for thirty to sixty minutes for the interview process. Interviews were performed at the AKTEACH Homeschool Office in Kodiak, Alaska.

Interview participants volunteered by using the contact numbers on the information emailed directly to the families with students in kindergarten through eighth grade

enrolled in AKTEACH during the 2015-2016 school year and posted in the three private Facebook groups. All who volunteered were interviewed.

3.6.3 Standardized Test Results

Standardized test results from the SBA in grades three through ten, for the 2011-2012, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years were collected from the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development. The SBA data were used to investigate if the student achievement for homeschool students is comparable to their public school counterparts. The data included all students in grades three through ten, enrolled in public schools in Kodiak and AKTEACH for the 2011-2012, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years.

As stated previously, the SBA was chosen as a source of data because I was able to have more than one year of data to compare. Because of this, the students who were tested between the spring of 2012 and 2014 are not necessarily from the same families that participated in this study.

3.7 Institution Review Board Process

At the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), if you are planning to have human participants in your study, it is required that you go through the UAF Institution Review Board (IRB) with the Office of Research Integrity. The IRB is an independent party that consists of community members, scientists, and non-scientists who are not affiliated with the university. The UAF IRB Protocol must be completed and reviewed by the UAF IRB before any research involving human participants begins.

There are several steps to go through before beginning to work on the IRB Protocol that will be reviewed. It is an expectation that the Belmont Report must be read and understood. You must be able to apply the ethical principles to your work. The Belmont Report involves three ethical principles of 1) Respect for persons (autonomy), 2) Beneficence and 3) Justice.

It is also expected for everyone working on a UAF IRB Protocol to demonstrate knowledge of human subject protections. Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) is used for all involved with the research to enroll and complete modules regarding the basic ethical principles and regulations that govern research with human participants. The IRB Protocol will not be approved until everyone on the research team has completed this training.

Once the CITI training was completed by everyone on the research team, the IRB Protocol was completed and turned into the UAF IRB to review for approval. The protocol outlined researchers involved, objectives and methods of the planned research, the research population, recruitment process, risks and benefits to participants, and the consent process. After approval was attained by the IRB, the research began.

3.7.1 Informed Consent

As required by the IRB, an Informed Consent Form was created for participants of the survey and the interview portion of the study. The Informed Consent Form (Appendix A) containing the parent survey link was emailed to all families enrolled with AKTEACH and was posted on three closed Facebook Groups where the members of the group are

homeschooling in Alaska. The Informed Consent Form was also presented at the beginning of the survey (Appendix B), and by continuing to the questions, they were giving consent. Parents completed the survey wherever they felt comfortable, and because no IP address or confidential information was gathered from the survey, they could be assured that it was anonymous. For full consent form information, see Appendix A for the Informed Consent Form.

After surveys were complete, interviews were conducted at the AKTEACH Homeschool Office in Kodiak, Alaska. The Informed Consent Form was also presented and signed by the participants before beginning the interview. For full consent form information, see Appendix A for the Informed Consent Form.

3.8 Data Collection Protocols and Timeline

Information about this research and request for participation was directly emailed to the 44 families with students in kindergarten through eighth grade enrolled in AKTEACH for the 2015-2016 school year on May 22, 2016. Information about this research and request for participation was also posted in three closed Facebook groups between May 22 – June 14, 2016. These groups have members that are homeschooling in Alaska. A survey was created using Survey Monkey on May 22, 2016, with it setup not to collect IP addresses to ensure anonymity.

The survey link and contact information for those willing to participate in interviews was included in the post, with the survey and interviews open May 22 to July 31, 2016. Survey results were accessed within Survey Monkey after it closed on July 31, 2016.

Electronic data from the online survey were stored on my personal, password-protected computer. Data will be deleted at the end of the study.

Participants interested in being interviewed, were requested to call me with the contact information to schedule a time that worked for them between May 22 and July 31, 2016. Interviews were audio recorded using Quick Time Player, then later transcribed by hand. Electronic data of the audio recordings were stored on my personal, password-protected computer. Data will be deleted at the end of the study.

SBA results were downloaded from the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development for the 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014 school years. Electronic downloads of the SBA results were stored on my personal, password-protected computer. Data will be deleted at the end of the study.

3.9 Data Analysis Protocols and Timeline

Some questions in the online survey called for short responses from participants, and the answers were analyzed by looking for key words that were repeated in multiple responses. The number of respondents that had specific key words were compared to the total number of respondents to get the percentage of respondents in agreement. Analysis of this data occurred between August and September, 2016.

Audio recordings of interviews were reviewed and transcribed by hand between August and October 2016. Transcripts from the interviews were analyzed between October and December 2016 to find key words that emerged. The participants that had a specific key word were compared to the total number of interview participants.

To analyze the historical student achievement data, percentages for each SBA assessment were averaged for the four elementary schools in Kodiak for each subject and grade level. These percentages were then compared to the percentages from the correspondence program AKTEACH, and a table was created in November, 2016.

Chapter 4: Results and Analysis Relative to the Problem

4.1 Introduction

The focus of this study was to examine parent perspectives on the topic of homeschooling in Alaska. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What does homeschooling look like for families in Alaska?
2. What are parents' perceptions on homeschooling regulations in Alaska?
3. Why do parents choose to homeschool with a correspondence program that has more regulations than if they homeschool independently?

Questions were investigated using an anonymous online survey and follow up interviews with a subgroup of survey participants. The population surveyed resided in Alaska. A total of 1,757 adults were asked to participate in this study. Of this population, 32 participants were included in the survey portion of this study. Request for volunteers at the end of the survey provided nine participants for the interview portion of this study. Interview participants were not an accurate representation of the state, as all participants live on Kodiak Island, including the city of Kodiak and rural areas outside of the city.

The demographics for the families enrolled in AKTEACH and directly invited to participate in the study included 92% female and 8% male adults. It is difficult to ascertain this same information for those contacted through Facebook groups, so the population is unknown.

Many homeschool families like their privacy and may not be willing to participate if certain data are collected. For this reason, the survey was anonymous, and no data were

collected on the demographics, such as race or economic class, other than their experience with homeschooling and the enrollment status within a correspondence program.

The majority of participants in the online survey were from the Kodiak area, including but not the city of Kodiak, as well as the rural areas of the island. The majority of the respondents were also enrolled with AKTEACH.

Interview participants were almost all female, with one out of nine being male. Eight out of nine participants were enrolled with a correspondence program, with seven of these enrolled in AKTEACH. The one other participant was not enrolled in a correspondence program.

Achievement results from all homeschool students enrolled in AKTEACH in grades three through ten were compared to achievement results from all public school students in Kodiak, Alaska, in grades three through ten. The results were gathered from the Alaska Standards Based Assessment (SBA) from the 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and the 2013-2014 school years.

4.2 Online Survey Results

For all figures relating to the online survey results, the percentage of participants that chose each answer. The actual number of participants that chose each answer is noted in parenthesis.

4.2.1 Results Relating to Homeschooling in Alaska

To understand what families that homeschool in Alaska look like, questions were asked on an anonymous online survey that related to why they homeschool, their

philosophy of teaching, how curriculum is chosen, how progress is measured, and if they have a student enrolled in a correspondence program.

Participants were asked what led them to homeschool their child or children, and they were able to choose more than one answer. Concerns with public school curriculum and over testing in public schools was a popular answer, with almost half of the participants choosing each of these.

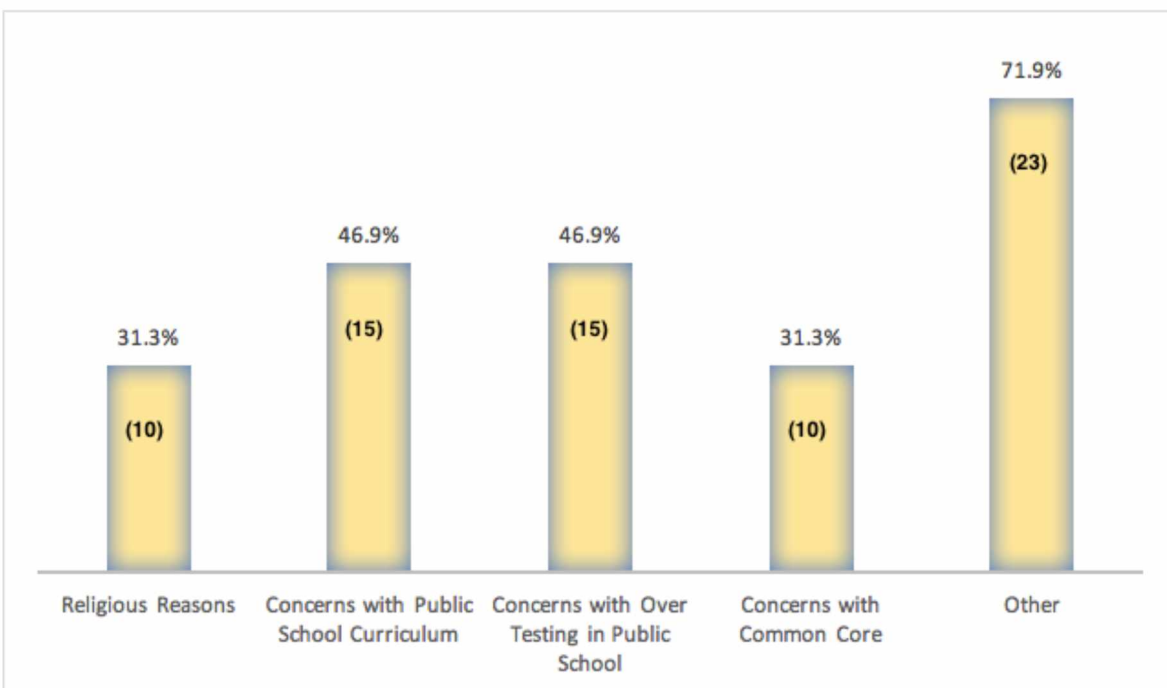


Figure 4.1 Reasons for Homeschooling

The participants that chose “other” gave a short response to explain their reasons for homeschooling. Figure 4.2 shows the common answers that emerged.

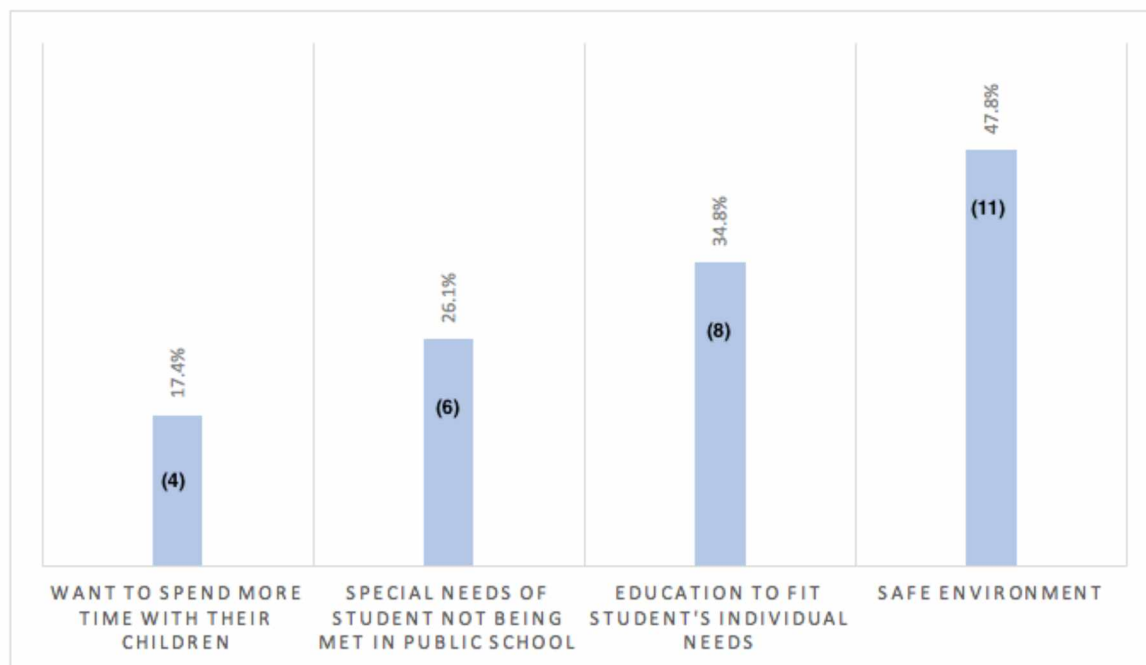


Figure 4.2 More Reason for Homeschooling

Almost half of the participants that initially chose “other,” noted that a safe environment for their child or children was a factor for homeschooling. From the short answer responses, this included such things as bullying; teachers as poor role models; little supervision in schools; drugs, sex and violence; negative or stressful environment; and poor socialization in school. It also included students who have life threatening allergies and the training of staff, other parents or volunteers, and supervision regarding this.

Participants noted how many years of experience they had with homeschooling. As seen in Figure 4.3, there was almost an equal amount of responses from each experience level that was given.

Participants were asked how they choose curriculum for their child or children, short responses were given and common themes emerged. Figure 4.4 shows that the two most popular answers were that the parents research and use reviews to help choose a curriculum, and a curriculum that best fits the learning style of the child is chosen.

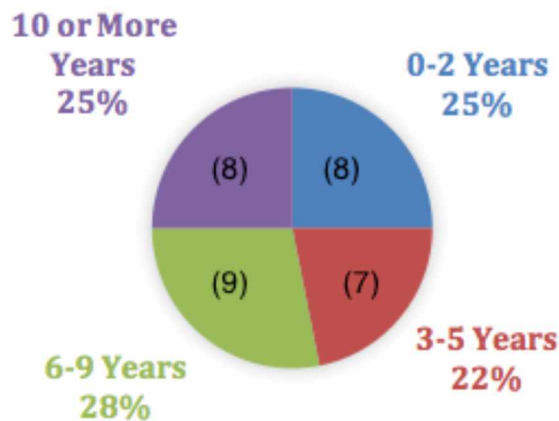


Figure 4.3 Experience in Homeschooling

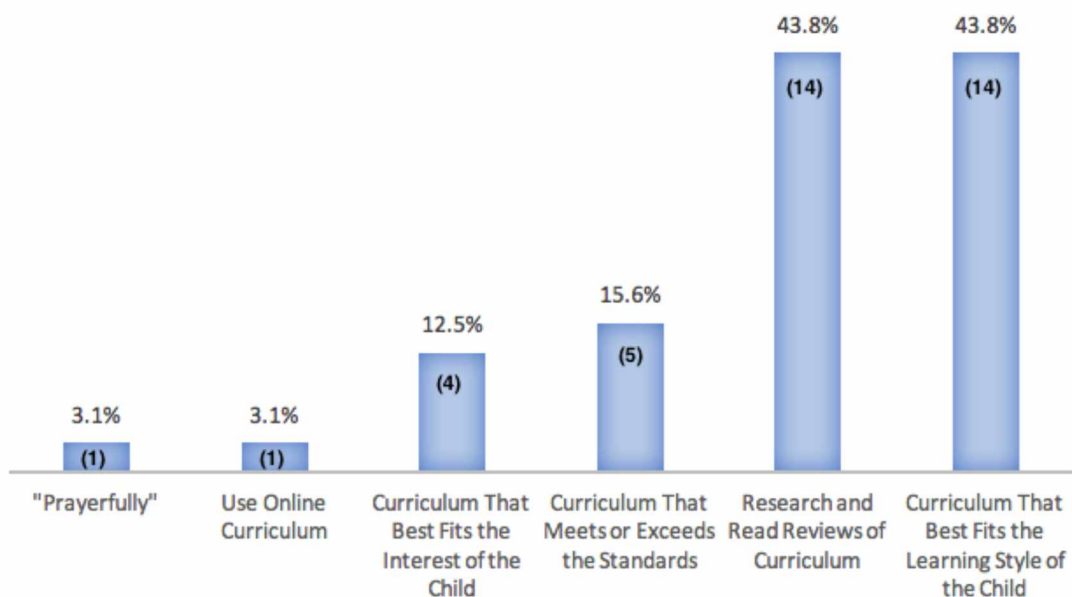


Figure 4.4 Choosing a Curriculum

Definitions of the most known or common philosophies or pedagogies were listed for the participants on the survey. They were allowed to choose any that applied to them, and also questions included a comment box to explain if they chose “other.”

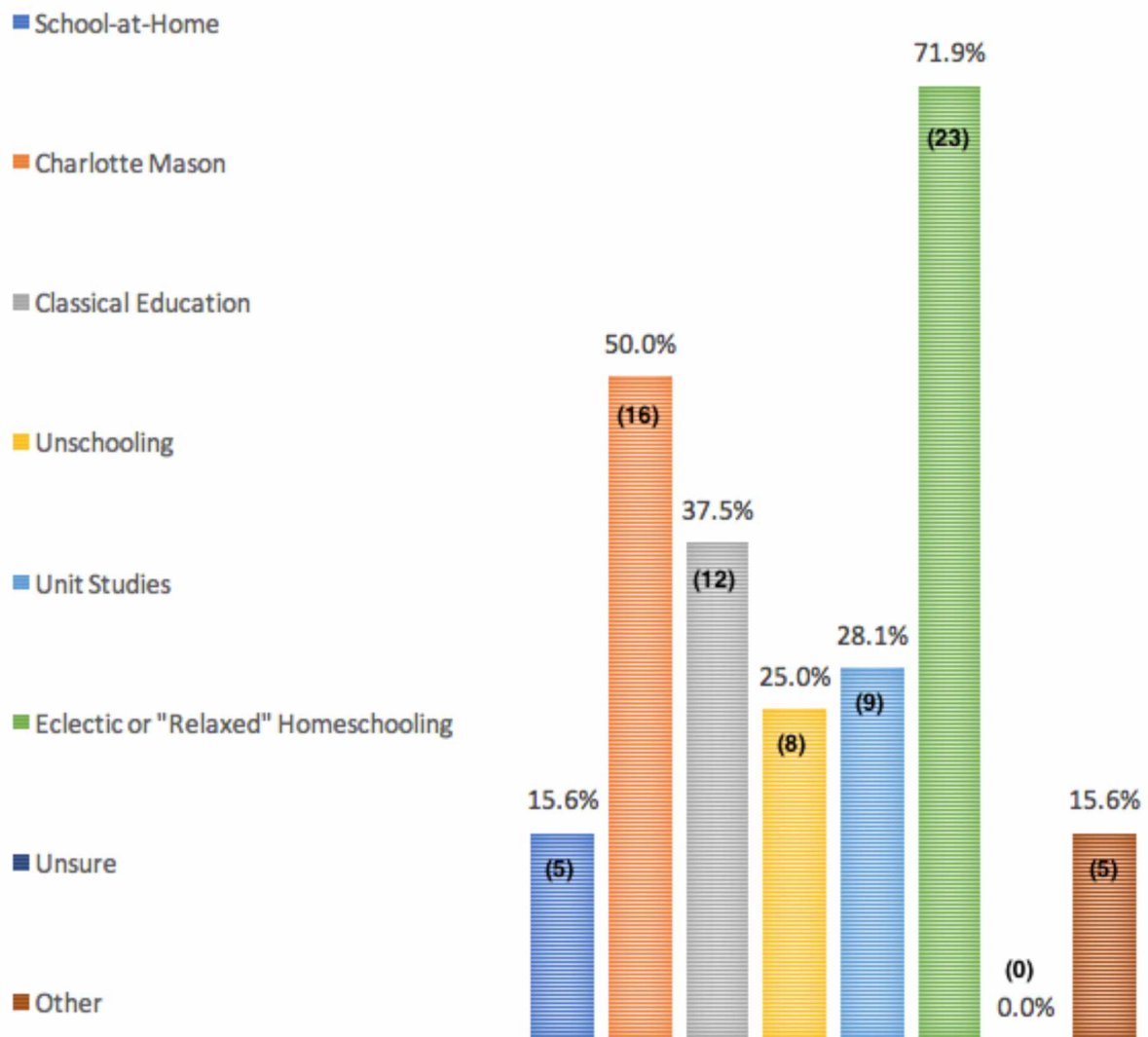


Figure 4.5 Homeschool Approaches or Pedagogies

Of the respondents, 15.63% or five participants, chose “other” and gave a short response to specify. Two noted that they use a little bit of each approach, one noted that they are a Constructivist specifically, which uses multiple approaches. One noted that they are Waldorf inspired, and the other noted that they use Thomas Jefferson Education.

Figure 4.6 shows how participants responded when asked if they find value in summative assessments or standardized assessments by the State of Alaska, such as the SBAs or Alaska Measures of Progress (AMP). Slightly more than half stated they do not find value in these.

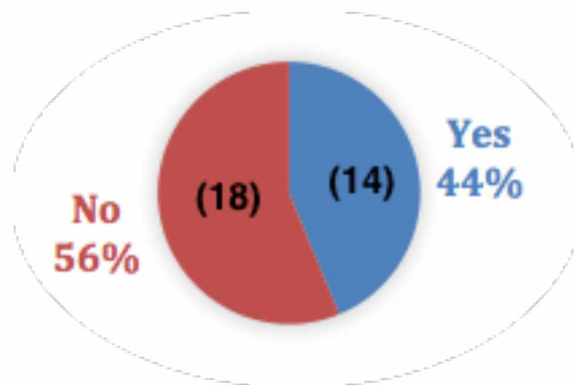


Figure 4.6 Value for Parents with Summative or Standardized Assessments

Participants noted in a comment box their explanation as to why they chose yes or no on there being value to summative assessments. The only positive response was that there are benefits to knowing the progress of their child compared to others academically, as remarked by thirteen of the participants. All other comments noted the undesirable side of the testing, as seen in Figure 4.7.

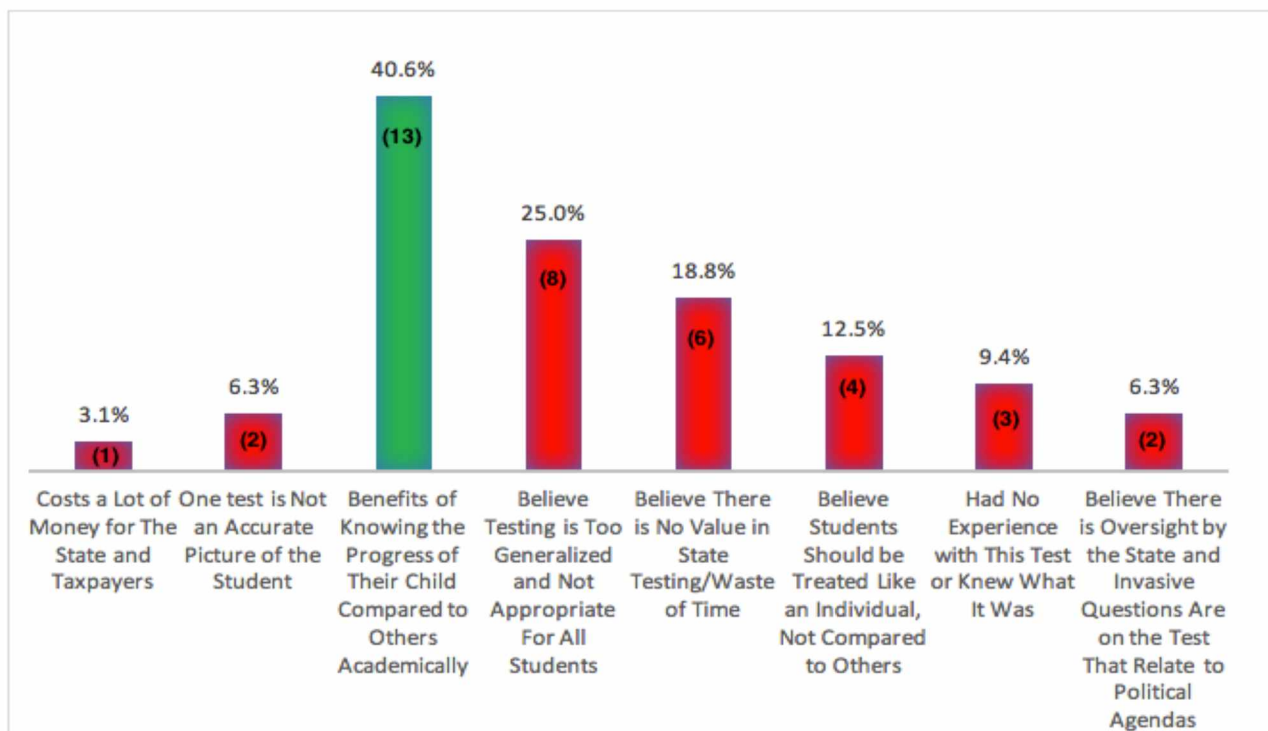


Figure 4.7 Explanation by Parents of Value/No Value in Summative or Standardized Assessments

One participant noted, “I would love to see a system where families had more choice in which test they gave their child and then use it year to year to show progress.” Another participant seemed to have the same idea with the comment, “My only issue is that we aren’t given the choice about which test we want to use!”

Parents were also asked in an open-ended question to explain how they measure growth of their child or children. Figure 4.8 illustrates that nearly two-thirds of the participants, or 65.63%, remarked that they use the curriculum, daily work, quizzes and/or tests to measure student growth, though some noted more than one way of measuring progress.

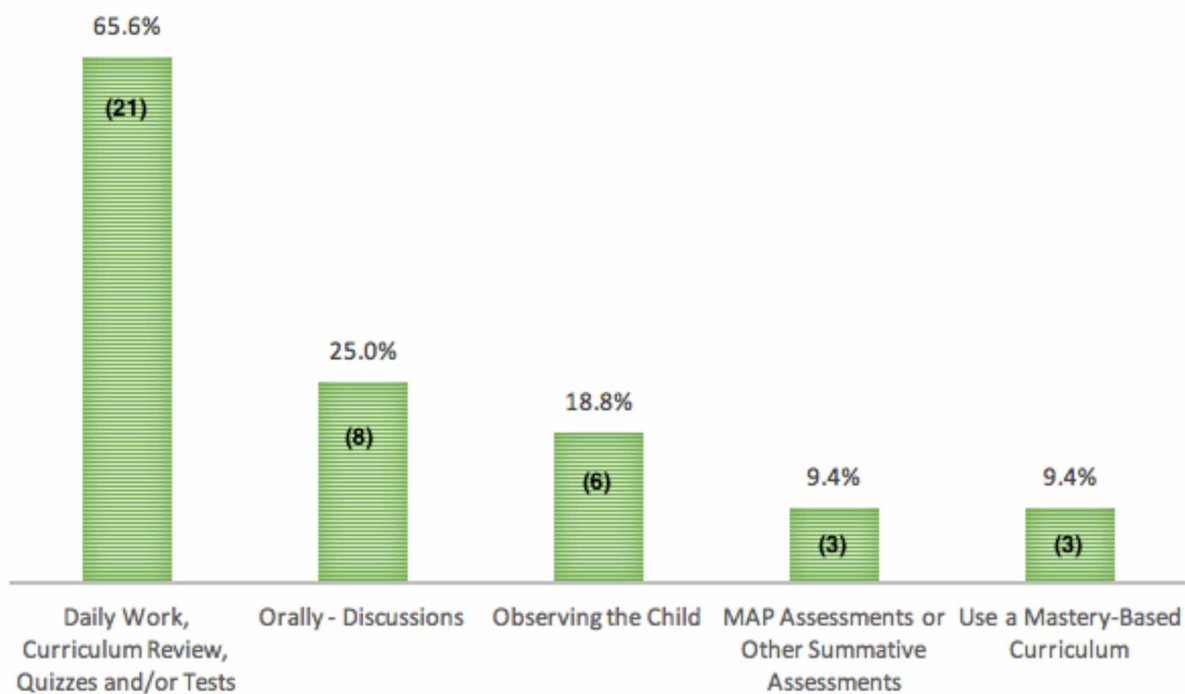


Figure 4.8 Measuring Student Growth in Homeschool

4.2.2 Results Relating to Parent Perceptions on Homeschool Regulations in Alaska

As stated before, Alaska has one of the least amount of restrictions or regulations on homeschooling. Parents were asked on the online anonymous survey if they feel that it would benefit students to have more specific regulations, and they were asked to explain why they felt this way.

The vast majority, or 90.6%, of participants stated they do not feel that more regulations are needed in Alaska. Three participants noted that more homeschool regulations could be needed. They were asked to give their own response as to why they chose their answer. Figure 4.9 illustrates the common answers that emerged.

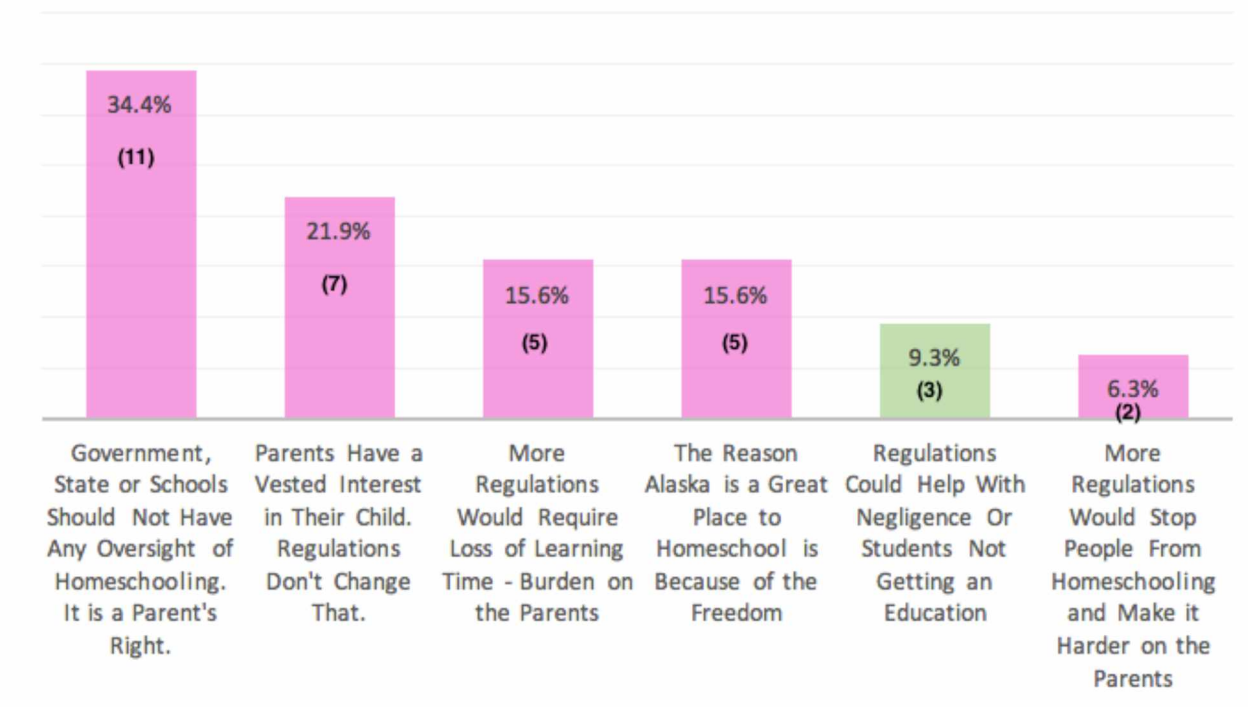


Figure 4.9 Parents' Insights Regarding Possible Changes in Homeschool Regulations

4.2.3 Results as to Why Parents Homeschool Through a Correspondence School

Alaska is different than other states because it offers parents the ability to receive funding for their children if they choose to homeschool and enroll them in a correspondence school. This requires them to follow more state mandates or regulations than they would if they homeschooled independently. Questions were asked on the online survey that identifies why parents choose to follow more regulations by enrolling their child in a correspondence program.

Of the respondents, 81.25% have at least one child enrolled with a correspondence program. If they did have a child enrolled in a correspondence program, they were asked to share what made them decide to enroll. Figure 4.10 shows the four common items that were mentioned.

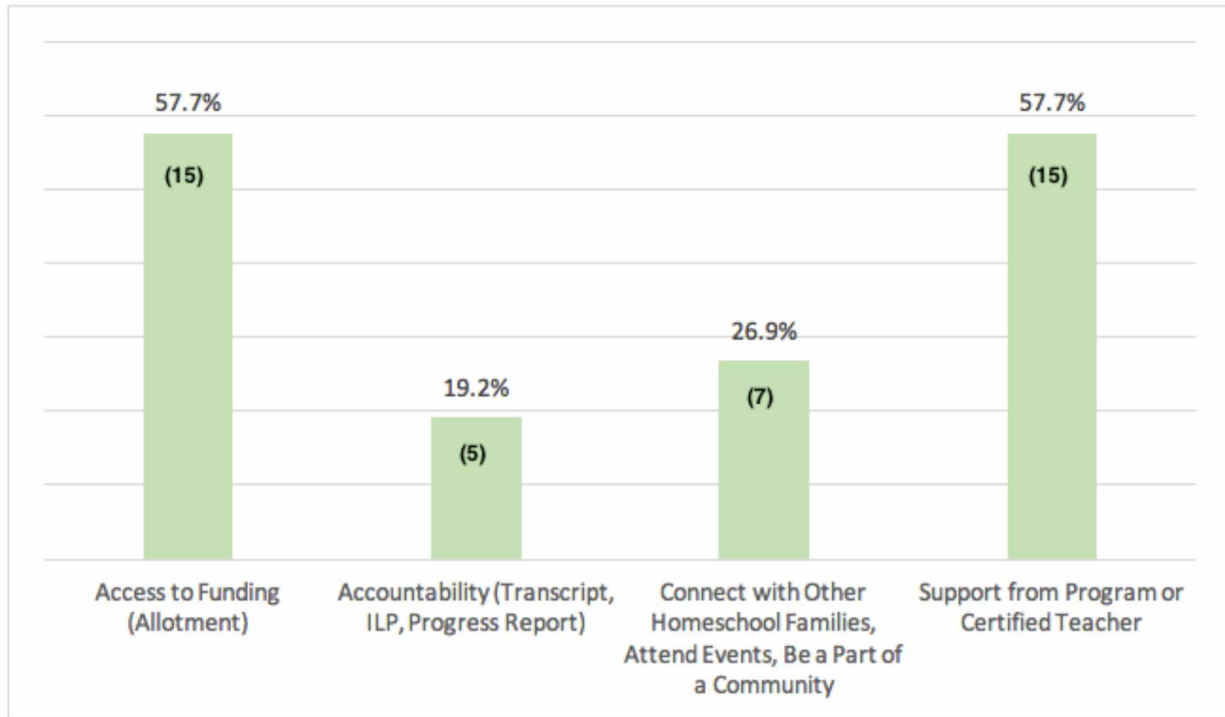


Figure 4.10 Parents' Reasons for Enrolling in a Correspondence Program

When asked about the benefits to enrolling with a program, twenty-nine participants answered, and three skipped this question. They were able to choose all that applied, and if their answer was not noted, they could choose "other" and write a short response. Figure 4.11 outlines the benefits parents selected.

For the eight participants that chose "other" and wrote a short response, three identified either funding or access to events. Figure 4.12 displays the results of these comments.

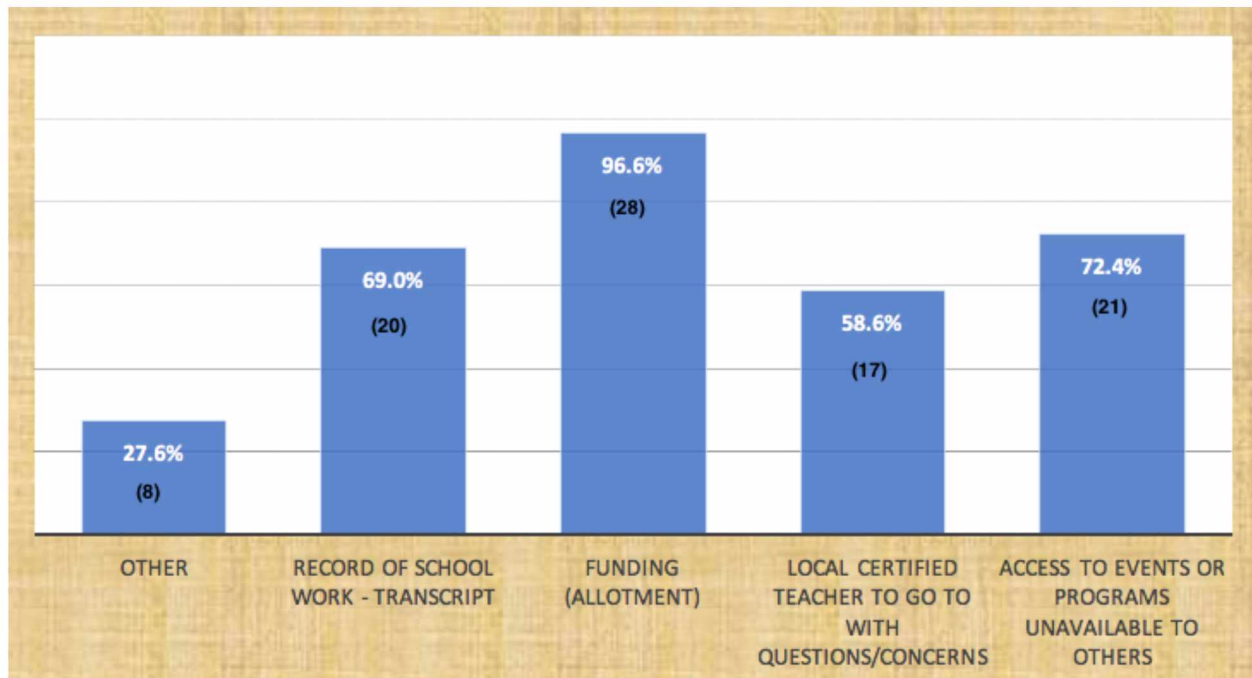


Figure 4.11 Benefits to Enrolling in a Correspondence Program

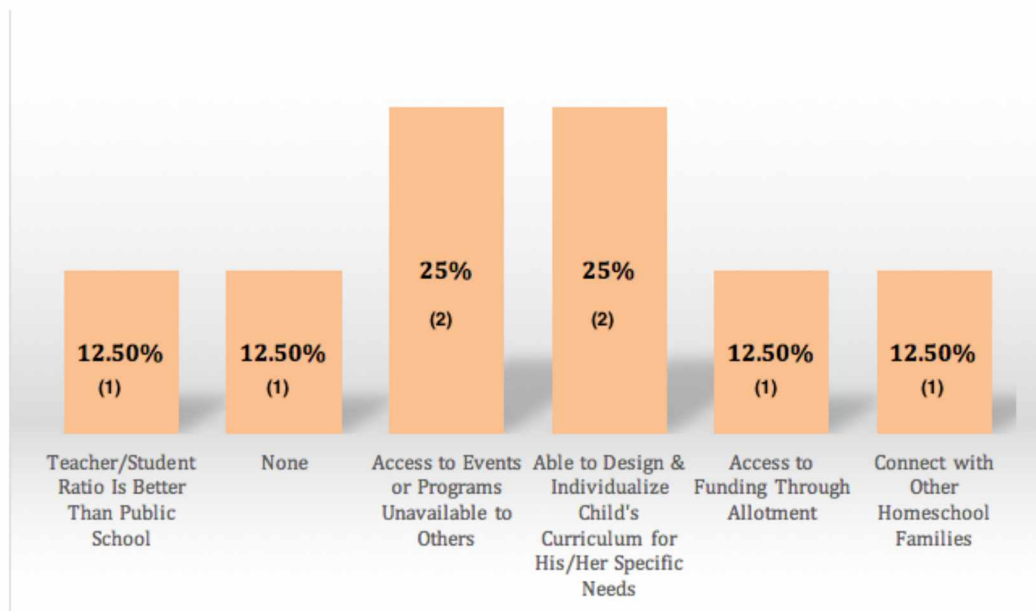


Figure 4.12 Other Benefits to Enrolling in a Correspondence Program

When asked what the disadvantages to enrolling with a program, thirty-two participants answered this question. They were able to choose all that applied, and if their answer was not noted, they could choose “other” and write a short response. Figure 4.13 outlines what disadvantages parents selected.

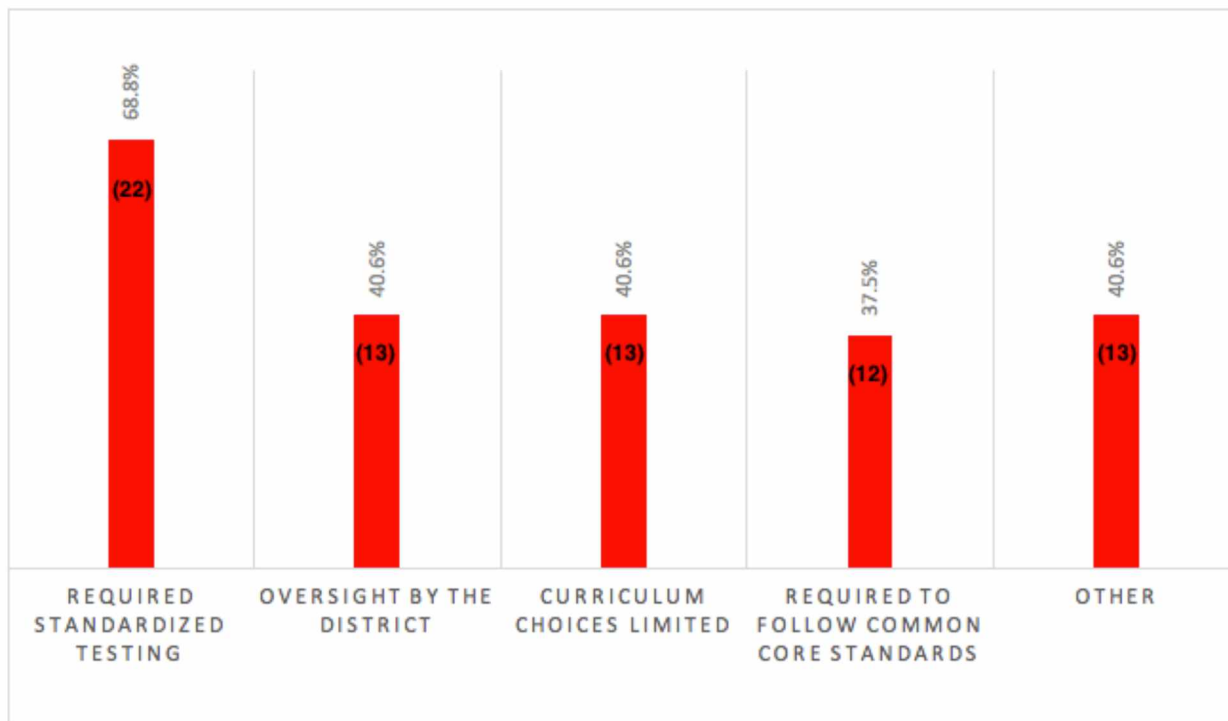


Figure 4.13 Disadvantages with Enrolling in a Correspondence Program

Thirteen participants chose “other” and wrote a short response. Three participants mentioned restrictions to curriculum if enrolled in a correspondence program, however this was an initial choice that could have been selected. There were a few individual answers along with three common answers that at least two or three people agreed on, as seen in Figure 4.14.

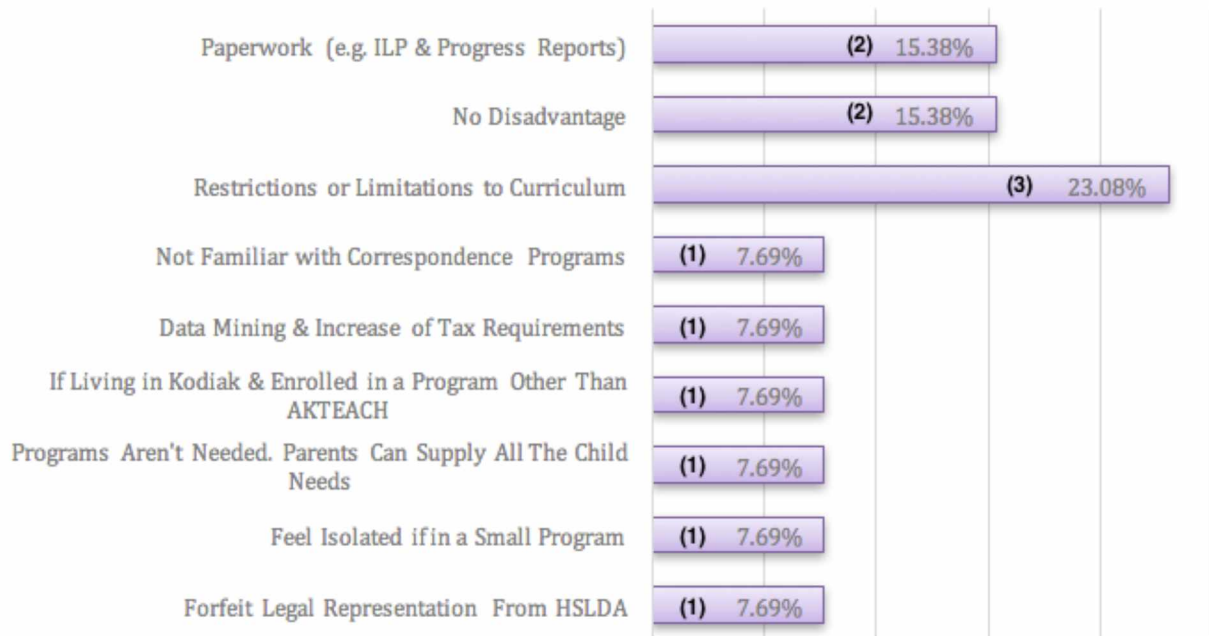


Figure 4.14 Other Disadvantages to Enrolling in a Correspondence Program

4.3 Interview Results

There was a total of nine participants in the interviews. Eight of those participants have at least one child enrolled with a correspondence program, and seven of those eight are enrolled with AKTEACH.

4.3.1 Results Relating to Homeschooling in Alaska

Parents were asked three questions during the interview to give insight as to what homeschooling looks like in Alaska. This included the advantages and disadvantages to homeschooling, as well as how there is accountability in homeschooling.

When parents were asked what the advantages to homeschooling are, 100% of the participants stated that customizing their child's education was an advantage. Participants specifically noted that they were able to move at the child's pace, whether that is moving quickly through a subject or having to stop and take time on a topic to get a better understanding. Parents are able to teach with the child's learning style in mind, the interests of the child, and can focus on a specific subject that interests the child. Figure 4.15 lists other advantages that were mentioned by participants.

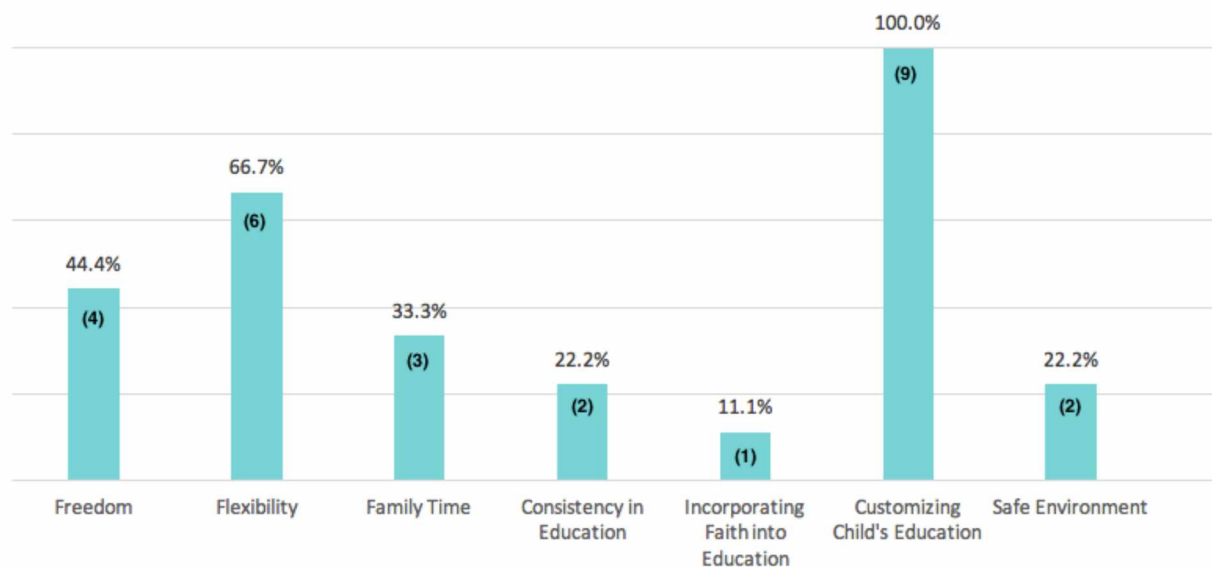


Figure 4.15 Advantages of Homeschooling

Parents were asked what disadvantages there are in homeschooling. A little over half noted that not having free time is the biggest disadvantage. Parents try to fit in a lot of different things, and their schedule is full because of this. It was stated that parents are also

always “on” when it comes to teaching, so they don’t feel that there is truly down time.

Results are seen in Figure 4.16.

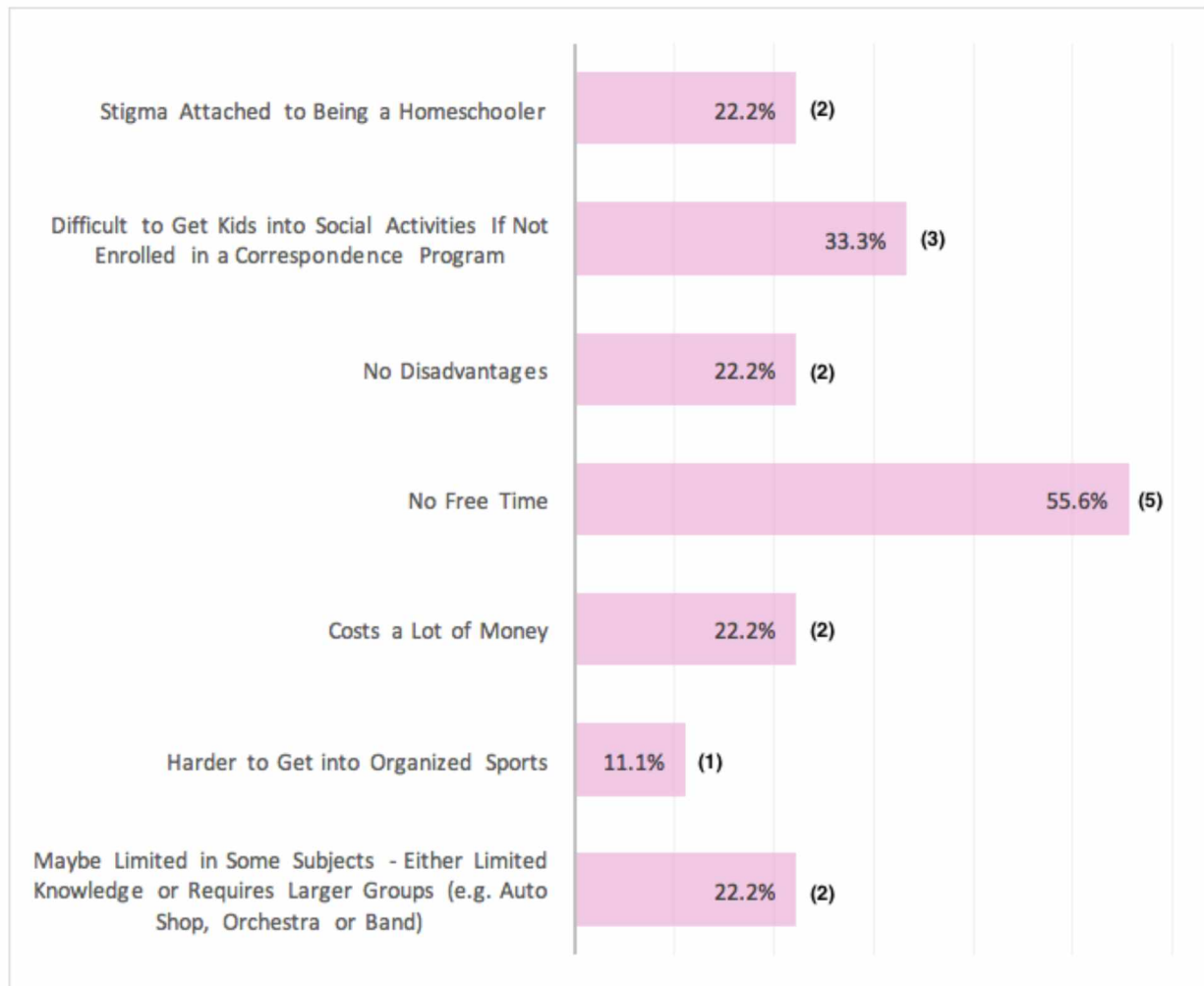


Figure 4.16 Disadvantages of Homeschooling

Those that noted the stigma that is attached to being a homeschooler stated that there is social pressure to have their child in public school by people who use the public school system. Parents are told that they should have their child in school. Parents noted that their kids are often quizzed on random topics by people when they find out that they

are homeschooled. Parents also feel like they aren't allowed to have a bad day and vent on what happened because the response from others will be that they should put the children in public school. It was also noted that there is social pressure from those that homeschool independently to not use a correspondence program. They have been told that they are jeopardizing the future of homeschool and are not real homeschoolers if their child is enrolled in a correspondence program in Alaska.

Accountability in homeschool compared to public school teachers being required to show accountability through the student-achievement on the state testing was discussed. Over half of the participants remarked that there is accountability through the ILP, quarterly progress reports, and student work samples. However, this is only true for families that are enrolled in a correspondence program. Figure 4.17 illustrates all of the answers.

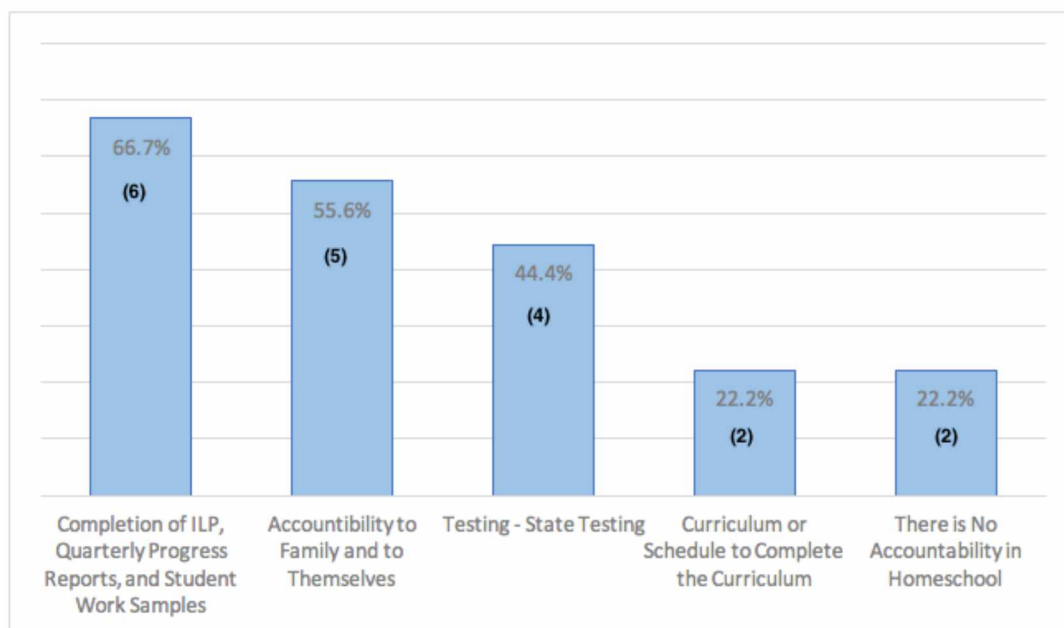


Figure 4.17 Accountability in Homeschool

Participants stated that they complete Individual Learning Plans, quarterly progress reports, and turn in student work samples for writing and math quarterly. However, all of these items are only required and collected if a student is enrolled in a correspondence program. Participants that stated that there could be accountability through testing also noted that the test doesn't really give them information as the teacher. The two participants that remarked there being no accountability noted that this was true unless they were enrolled in a correspondence program.

While discussing accountability with the idea of testing or state testing, one participant stated that homeschoolers come from all different backgrounds and approaches. To have to test a child in a way that doesn't correspond with how they are taught doesn't seem to make sense. It was also remarked that it would be nice if portfolios could be used instead of state testing, but also identified was that this would be difficult to ascertain if a student was truly meeting standards.

4.3.2 Results Relating to Parent Perceptions on Homeschool Regulations in Alaska

Parents were asked three questions during the interview regarding the parent perceptions on the homeschool regulation in Alaska. This included if Alaska was the best place to homeschool, what Alaska's homeschool regulation means to them, as well as if they feel that students would benefit from more specific regulations.

Of the responses, 100% stated that they agreed in some part with the statement that Alaska is one of the best places to homeschool. Reasons as to why they felt this way included the funds available to them and freedom to choose. It was noted by a few that there were mixed feelings, such as having too much freedom or that since too many people

are plugged into the correspondence programs, there are not vibrant homeschool co-ops in Alaska.

When the regulation regarding homeschooling in Alaska was read aloud, participants were asked what this meant to them. Of the participants, 100% noted that it meant parents have the freedom to school their child the way they see fit. Other common answers are noted in Figure 4.18.

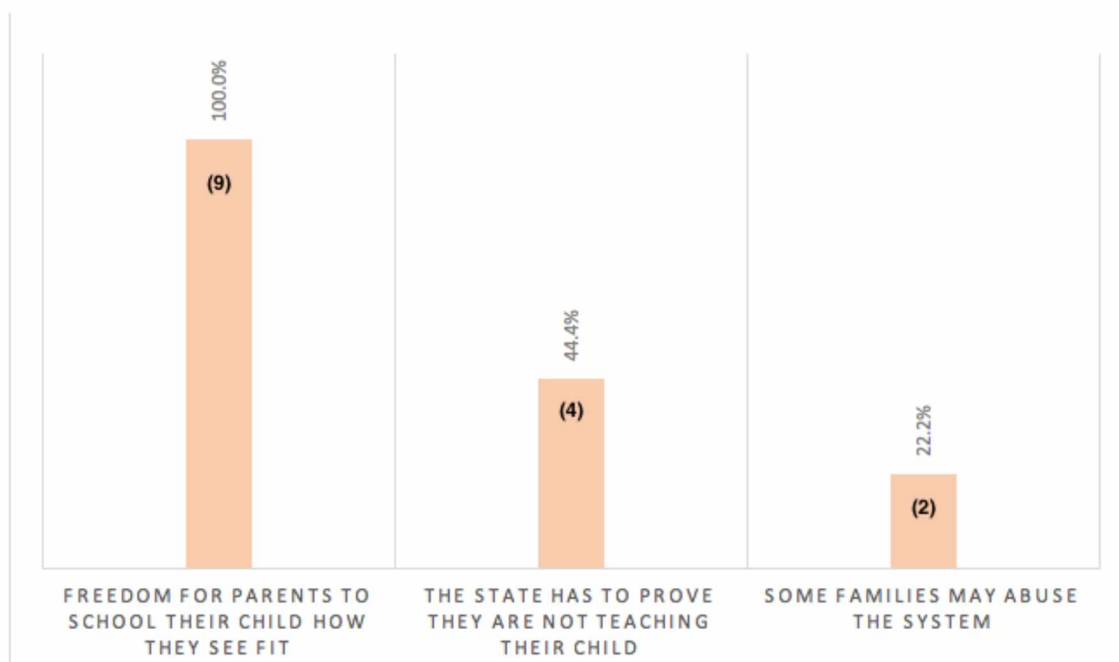


Figure 4.18 Parents' Perception of Alaska Homeschool Regulations

Parents were asked if they felt students would benefit from more specific regulations. Many noted that it was a hard call or difficult to answer because of how many others they know that would be unhappy or angry with more regulations. One participant acknowledged that it was difficult to answer because, "if you say yes, you're making a whole homeschool community of independent homeschoolers mad."

However, 66.67% noted that it is possible that there might be some that could benefit students, but of those that answered, none would say definitively that they were for more specific regulations. One participant specified however, “It would be hard to figure out how to do those regulations and still have everyone feel like they have their freedom to educate in the style they prefer.”

4.3.3 Results as to Why Parents Homeschool through a Correspondence Program

More regulations are in place in Alaska in regards to correspondence programs versus homeschooling independently in the state. When so many parents are against regulations on homeschooling, it begs the question: Why homeschool through a correspondence program when there are more regulations to follow?

Parents were asked what difference they see in homeschooling independently and homeschooling through a correspondence program. Figure 4.19 outlines the common answers.

There seems to be a stigma when it comes to other homeschooling families. If parents enroll their child in a correspondence program, they are often looked down on from independent homeschooling parents and told that they are “jeopardizing the future of homeschooling” and not looked at as true homeschoolers. I have also heard this from families that I work with at AKTEACH, outside of this study.

Based on the interview results, funding and the additional activities offered to those enrolled in a program seem to be the leading reason that parents choose to enroll their child into a program instead of independently homeschooling in Alaska.

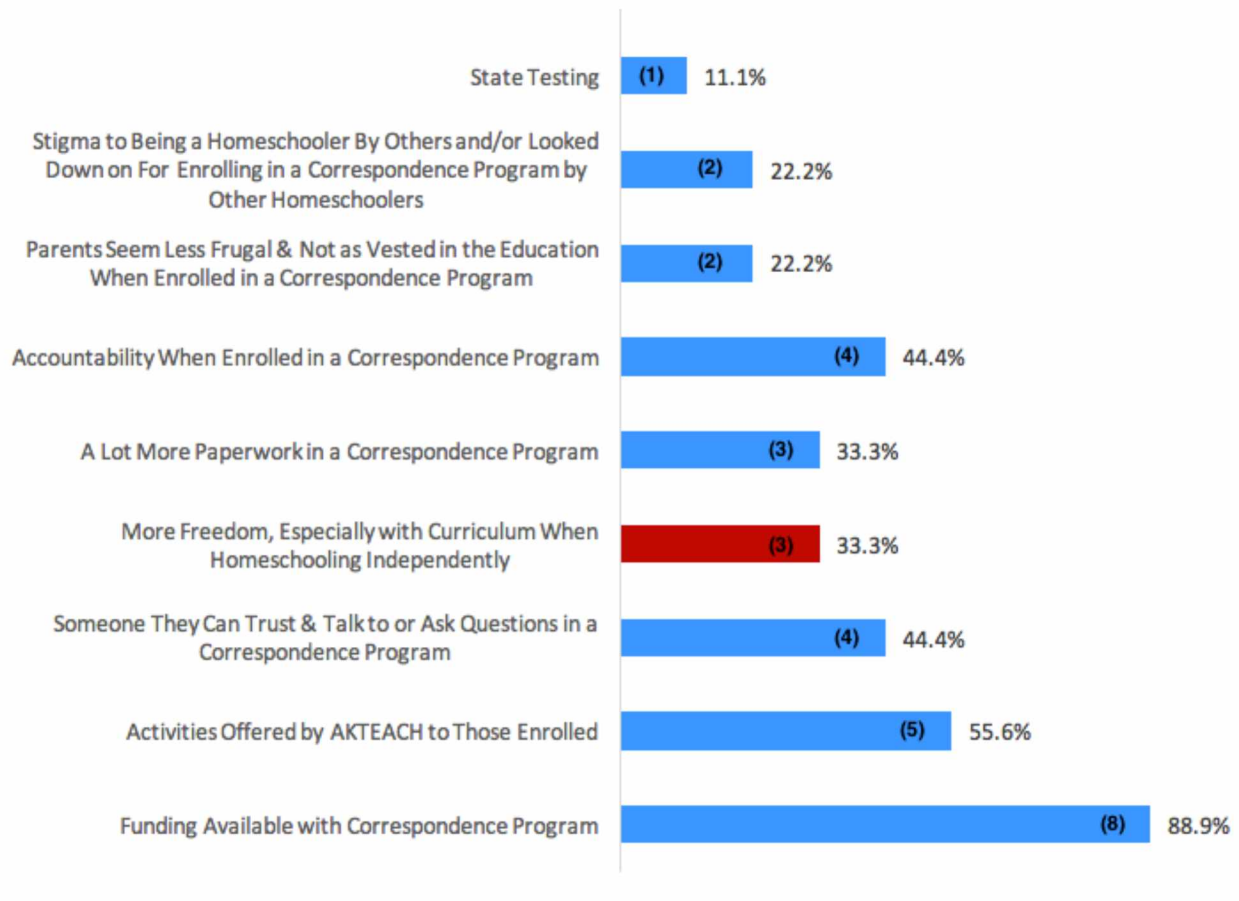


Figure 4.19 Difference Between Independent Homeschool & Correspondence Program

4.4 Standards Based Assessment Results

For the purpose of this study, test scores from the Alaska Standards Based Assessment (SBA) were analyzed from the 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014 school years. The public school average was comprised of the four Kodiak elementary schools for grades 3-5, the Kodiak Middle School for grades 6-8, and the Kodiak High School for grades 9-12. The homeschool average is from the local homeschool students enrolled in AKTEACH.

Table 4.1 shows the number of students tested each year that were enrolled with AKTEACH compared to the total number of students from the local elementary schools in Kodiak, Alaska.

Table 4.1 – Student Testing Numbers from SBAs in Kodiak, AK

Number of Students Tested – Alaska Standards Based Assessment (SBA)								
2011 – 2012								
	3rd grade	4th grade	5th grade	6th grade	7th grade	8th grade	9th grade	10th grade
Homeschool	11	9	8	8	11	9	2	5
Public School	160	169	153	165	161	157	190	191
2012 – 2013								
	3rd grade	4th grade	5th grade	6th grade	7th grade	8th grade	9th grade	10th grade
Homeschool	11	9	7	12	10	10	3	8
Public School	140	153	164	153	161	160	181	187
2013 – 2014								
	3rd grade	4th grade	5th grade	6th grade	7th grade	8th grade	9th grade	10th grade
Homeschool	8	12	12	2	8	1	3	1
Public School	162	131	132	155	154	162	178	168

As shown in the Table 4.2, compared with the public school average, homeschool students had a higher percentage of students that scored advanced or proficient in reading for grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10; in writing for grades 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10; in math for grades 5, 6, 8, and 10; and in science for grades 8 and 10 in the 2011-2012 school year.

Table 4.2 – 2011-2012 SBA Assessment Data Analysis from Kodiak, AK

2011 - 2012 SBA Assessments					
		% of students scoring Advanced or Proficient			
		Reading	Writing	Math	Science
3rd Grade	Homeschool	87.5%	75%	75%	
	Public School Average	84.445%	83.45%	80.075%	
4th Grade	Homeschool	100%	91.66%	70%	40%
	Public School Average	84.505%	81%	79.%	60.3425%
5th Grade	Homeschool	100%	91.66%	91.66%	
	Public School Average	85.9125%	77.9625%	72.09%	
6th Grade	Homeschool	100%	100%	100%	
	Public School Average	85.81%	72.9%	70.32%	
7th Grade	Homeschool	100%	87.5%	62.5%	
	Public School Average	90.91%	84.31%	70.13%	
8th Grade	Homeschool	100%	100%	100%	100%
	Public School Average	90.12%	85.19%	73.33%	60.61%
9th Grade	Homeschool	50%	50%	25%	
	Public School Average	91.01%	85.71%	74.16%	
10th Grade	Homeschool	100%	100%	100%	100%
	Public School Average	82.53%	78.31%	64.88%	66.47%

Table 4.3 shows that for the 2012-2013 school year, compared with the public-school average, homeschool students had a higher percentage of students that scored advanced or proficient in reading for grades 4, 7, and 9; in writing for grades 3, 6, and 9; in math for grade 5; and in science for grade 4.

Table 4.3 - 2012-2013 SBA Assessment Data Analysis from Kodiak, AK

2012 - 2013 SBA Assessments						
		% of students scoring Advanced or Proficient				
			Reading	Writing	Math	Science
3rd Grade	Homeschool		83.33%	83.33%	63.64%	
	Public School Average		88.6%	82.8375%	82.015%	
4th Grade	Homeschool		100%	77.77%	77.77%	55.56%
	Public School Average		83.3275%	84.3675%	81.24%	54.775%
5th Grade	Homeschool		62.5%	42.86%	87.5%	
	Public School Average		80.69%	75.1475%	76.5675%	
6th Grade	Homeschool		75%	83.33%	50%	
	Public School Average		80.79%	76%	79.08%	
7th Grade	Homeschool		91.66%	50%	40%	
	Public School Average		83.95%	80.75%	65.84%	
8th Grade	Homeschool		58.33%	58.33%	55.56%	44.44%
	Public School Average		92.99%	88.05%	83.75%	68.94%
9th Grade	Homeschool		100%	100%	33.33%	
	Public School Average		87.85%	81.11%	67.4%	
10th Grade	Homeschool		50%	37.5%	25% or fewer	42.86%
	Public School Average		81.52%	86.1%	74.87%	66.12%

Table 4.4 shows that for the 2013-2014 school year, compared with the public school average, homeschool students had a higher percentage of students that scored advanced or proficient in reading and writing for grades 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10; in math for grades 5, 6, 8, and 10; and in science for grades 8 and 10.

Table 4.4 - 2013-2014 SBA Assessment Data Analysis from Kodiak, AK

2013 - 2014 SBA Assessments					
		% of students scoring Advanced or Proficient			
		Reading	Writing	Math	Science
3 rd Grade	Homeschool	87.5%	75%	75%	
	Public School Average	90.4125%	87.8475%	84.365%	
4 th Grade	Homeschool	100%	91.66%	70%	40%
	Public School Average	84.21%	86.86%	79.8675%	59.94%
5 th Grade	Homeschool	100%	91.66%	91.66%	
	Public School Average	85.785%	81.6%	73.5475%	
6 th Grade	Homeschool	100%	100%	100%	
	Public School Average	85.81%	72.9%	70.32%	
7 th Grade	Homeschool	100%	87.5%	62.5%	
	Public School Average	90.91%	84.31%	70.13%	
8 th Grade	Homeschool	100%	100%	100%	100%
	Public School Average	90.12%	85.19%	73.33%	60.61%
9 th Grade	Homeschool	50%	50%	25%	
	Public School Average	91.01%	85.71%	74.16%	
10 th Grade	Homeschool	100%	100%	100%	100%
	Public School Average	82.53%	78.31%	64.88%	66.47%

Academic achievement of homeschool students can be controversial. Because this was not my main focus in the study, but more to give a context, I only used data from the Kodiak area for both the homeschool population and public school population. This provided a small but limited sample but the data were not analyzed with the idea of proving that homeschool students score better than public school students on standardized testing.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The popularity of homeschooling children is growing in Alaska, throughout the United States and around the world. As more regulations are put on public schools, with the Common Core Standards being implemented, and the concern for safety in schools growing, more parents are making the decision to homeschool their children.

Through this study, I was able to gain insight of homeschooling in Alaska, how parents perceive the homeschool regulations in Alaska, and why parents choose to homeschool through a correspondence program. However, the sample size was small and this can create bias in the data.

5.2 What Does Homeschooling Look Like for Families in Alaska?

Though this research was open to anyone who was homeschooling a child in Alaska and more than 1,500 people were invited to participate, the respondents were limited and many live in the Kodiak area. Because of this, this study may not be able to truly answer the question of what homeschooling looks like in Alaska, but does give a small insight or samples of what it looks like for families in the Kodiak region.

The majority of participants that responded to the online survey and were interviewed had a child or children enrolled with a correspondence program in Alaska. With the majority of respondents having a child enrolled in a correspondence program, they are following additional regulations than if they homeschooled independently.

The SBA data that were gathered are also from students that were enrolled with a correspondence program as there is no data for those that homeschool independently and do not take the annual state tests.

The reasons that these Alaskan parents have chosen to homeschool, follows what is being seen happening nationally. The top three concerns included public school curriculum, over- testing in public schools, and wanting a safe environment for their child or children. Parents specifically mentioned that a safe environment included such things as:

- Little supervision in public schools
- No longer confident in a school's ability to protect my child
- Exposure to bullying, drugs, sex, and violence
- Poor socialization in public schools
- Stressful environment

"According to the U.S. Department of Education, roughly nine out of ten parents who homeschooled during the 2011-2012 school year said school environment, meaning safety, drugs and peer pressure, contributed to their decision" (Russell, 2015).

It surprised me that safety was such a top concern, as I have this conversation a lot because of my current employment. Parents often talk to me about the curriculum that is used in public schools, the over testing, the push with the standards, wanting to individualize their child's education, and their child being able to work at their own pace, whether that is faster or slower than others. Safety is not necessarily brought up as much as all of the other concerns. This makes me wonder what has changed in schools for

parents in Alaska, and across the nation to feel that schools no longer provide a safe environment for children.

Based on my experience as a Homeschool Coordinator, I was also surprised to see that only about one-third of those that noted “other” on the survey regarding reasons to homeschool, commented that an education that meets their child’s individual needs was a reason for homeschooling. This includes their interests, ability level, non-conformity, ability to adjust curriculum in different areas of study, learning styles, and having one-on-one time. This was unexpected to me because most parents that initially speak to me, note this as being a large reason for deciding to try homeschooling.

Knowledge of the different curriculums that are out there for homeschoolers to use is imperative to my job as a homeschool coordinator. I have this discussion with every family that enrolls and we discuss what will best fit the needs of the child as well as the adult that will be teaching with the curriculum. Almost half of the participants reported that they wanted to choose a curriculum that best fits the learning style of their child and researched curriculum by reading reviews, blogs, word of mouth, and speaking with their contact teacher with a correspondence program.

The majority of parents in this study do not find value in the summative assessments that Alaska requires. Though those enrolled in a correspondence program are following the state standards with the curriculum that they are using, they don’t feel that the test gives them valuable information to help them with their teaching. A quarter of them feel that the testing is too generalized and not appropriate for all students. I wonder if this is because no one has shared results of the SBAs with the parents in regards to how they can adjust their teaching so that it was meaningful and useful in their teaching. Also,

the change in tests from the paper-based SBAs to the computer-based AMP caused problems in there not being the same kind of data to share. I only see this frustration growing now that we have implemented another different test for the 2016-2017 school year, the Performance Evaluation for Public Schools (PEAKS).

More than half of the parents noted that they use daily work, curriculum review, quizzes, and tests from within the curriculum to base how their child is progressing. This is very much what you would see in a classroom, as the teacher bases their lessons on how the students are doing with the work in class. If more teaching or re-teaching is necessary for a student to get a concept, then that is done. Discussions and observation were the next top two choices for how parents are choosing to measure growth in their child. Both are used in the classroom as well. I feel this is important to note because homeschooling is often questioned that the students are not getting the same kind of education or opportunity as those in the public or even private schools. From the limited sample, it shows that parents are using the same strategies to measure student growth and are aware of where their child is at academically.

Almost three quarters of the participants noted that they have an eclectic approach with their homeschooling. Not one style best fits their needs when working with their child. I find that I feel the same when I have been in the classroom. You take what works from different approaches and combine them to make your own. This changes with each student you work with, as no two students are alike. Again, I feel this is important to note because even though these parents are not necessarily a certified teacher, they have the same approaches or pedagogies that you would find with public school teachers.

Customizing the child's education is a great benefit of homeschooling. They are able to move at the child's pace, whether fast or slow, choose topics or subjects that the child is interested in to dive more deeply into it. They can use the child's learning style that best fits him or her to ensure that the child is getting the needed concepts. This is something that cannot be done the same way in the classroom because there are twenty or more students in a classroom, all at different levels, different learning styles and interests. The most common disadvantage noted by participants, was not having free time. The parents feel that they are always teaching their child or children and there really isn't down time.

When accountability in homeschool was examined, more than half of the participants noted that they complete the ILPs, quarterly progress reports and turn in student work samples quarterly. However, this is where the lines blur, as homeschoolers are not required to do these items unless they are enrolled in a correspondence program. When it was shared that this is only true for those enrolled in a correspondence program, parents were not able to quickly come up with a way that they are accountable other than to themselves or to the family. Maybe there could have been a more rounded picture had more independent homeschoolers volunteered to participate in the interviews.

5.3 Parent Perceptions on Homeschool Regulations in Alaska

The majority of parents do not want more regulations on homeschooling in Alaska. However, the majority of parents that responded for the survey and participated in the interview are also following more regulations than if they homeschooled independently, because their child is enrolled in a correspondence program. Based on the responses, I believe that they may not see the difference in the laws or requirements for those that are

homeschooling independently and those that are homeschooling through a correspondence program.

Interviews showed that all participants felt in some part that Alaska is a great place to homeschool. Most noted the freedom to choose and having funds available to them. One participant noted that “the monetary incentive is obviously very helpful, as homeschooling is expensive, so having the reimbursement, the ability to pay for it, is very helpful.” Again, this is where the line blurs some for participants, as the funds are only available to homeschool students if they are enrolled in a correspondence program. Correspondence programs have more state regulations than the one homeschool regulation.

When asked if they felt that students would benefit from more specific regulations, parents had a difficult time answering. More than half noted that they could see it being possible to benefit students, depending on what the regulation might be, however one could definitively say they would want specific regulations. Some noted within the interviews that there are families that might abuse the freedom that Alaska has in homeschooling and that they could see why some laws might need to happen or change. One participant noted that she has a school-at-home mentality so it is difficult for her to see unschooling, and questions if specific regulations need to be in place for them. I found this interesting that a homeschooler would consider regulations for one style or homeschool approach.

One participant commented that she would like to see something more like a Montessori approach used when looking at student growth by maybe having a student portfolio. As she was sharing her thoughts, she talked herself out of this idea, understanding how hard this would be for the state to manage or to be able to easily see

that the student was proficient in the standards as the curriculum varies so much from family to family.

If students are not required to register with the state as homeschoolers, then how can it be said that all homeschoolers achieve higher than public school students? We have no data to support achievement of homeschoolers who are not enrolled in a correspondence program in Alaska, as they do not have to take standardized tests or report student progress.

Based on the responses to questions during the interviews, I believe that some of the participants view the regulations on correspondence programs in Alaska as the same as homeschool regulations. However, ultimately, one can homeschool in Alaska and no accountability is required, nor are they even required to notify the state that their child will be homeschooled.

If someone wishing to homeschool was required to get a degree in education and a teaching certification, would this affect the student's achievement? Based on what I have seen in my current position, I'm not sure that it would necessarily affect student achievement as a whole. Another option would be for the homeschool educator to have to pass the Praxis exam or other teacher preparation exam in order to be allowed to teach. These are all requirements for public school teachers as a base minimum and would show that the parents have a general understanding of the different subjects.

Levels of effectiveness for teachers and administrators in the public school setting are measured by how students score on the standardized assessments. One has to wonder why this would only be limited to public schools if it is an accurate view of effectiveness of teaching. Should homeschool be regulated and homeschool educators be held to the same

standards as public school teachers? If we are concerned that all teachers need to be effective in student learning, then shouldn't homeschool educators be held to the same standards as public educators?

In order to have an accurate view of student achievement of homeschool students in Alaska, I think at a bare minimum, families would need to notify the state that the child is being homeschooled and to participate in the annual state testing.

5.4 Why Homeschool Through a Correspondence Program When There Are More Regulations?

A vast majority of the respondents have at least one child enrolled in a correspondence program. Though this gives a more accurate view of why someone would choose to homeschool through a correspondence school, it may provide skewed results in other questions if they don't have a good understanding of homeschool law vs. correspondence school law. Over half of the participants stated that the benefits of the correspondence programs include having access to the funding that can be used for better curriculum, private lessons, tutoring, and supplies. This was not a surprise to me, as I have had many families choose to homeschool with our program for the sole purpose of having the funding to pay for curriculum and activities that they were unable to afford on their own. Slightly over half also stated that having support from someone, their certified teacher, to help guide them and give ideas was a reason for choosing to enroll their child or children. Though I work with a lot of families and provide support, I am still a little surprised that this many stated it was a reason for enrolling through a correspondence program. The required annual standardized testing was the common answer for what the

parents feel is a disadvantage to homeschooling through a correspondence program, with over half of the participants choosing this answer.

Chapter 6: Recommendations and Conclusion

6.1 Recommendation of Areas of Further Research

Research is currently lacking for the topic of homeschooling in Alaska. It would be beneficial to research with a larger number of participants than those included in this study, including more of those that homeschool independently. The only homeschool students that take statewide assessments in Alaska, previously the SBAs, are those students who are enrolled in a correspondence program. It would be best if a study could be done where independent homeschoolers are the participants and tested with a summative assessment to get an accurate view on how all homeschool students are doing academically within the state. This could be compared with those that homeschool through a correspondence program since the data are more readily available in Alaska.

Privacy and the stigma of homeschooling makes it difficult to have homeschooling families willing to participate in studies. As noted by some, they feel it is a parent's right to school their child how they see fit and they do not think that the government should have any oversight. I think having a relationship with homeschool families does help, but the researcher would need to put him or herself out there to get to know homeschoolers in many areas of the state, to increase trust between the families and the researcher. This would provide a more accurate view of homeschooling in Alaska.

To have a higher number of respondents, it might be beneficial to hold events, such as the STEAM events that AKTEACH facilitates open to all homeschoolers, throughout the state of Alaska, and at those events ask parents to complete the survey. It is important that there is a more accurate view of homeschooling throughout the state.

As stated previously, I think in order to have an accurate view of the student achievement in homeschool, there would need to be additional regulations to require that the state be notified if a child was going to be homeschooled and for the child to participate in the annual state testing.

6.2 Conclusion

Homeschooling's popularity is growing in Alaska. Based on the limited sample for this study, the leading reason that parents chose to homeschool was not for religious reasons as has been seen in the past. More parents are choosing to homeschool to best fit the educational needs of their child. Based on the limited number of students and data, there are patterns to show that students who are homeschooled and enrolled in a correspondence program in Alaska seem to do well on the SBAs, even though that is not the parents' leading drive when teaching their child.

There are many similarities in how public school teachers educate the students and how parents educate their child at home. Parents use some of the same philosophies or approaches that many public school teachers use or believe in. Curriculum is chosen based on the needs of child. Student progress is monitored through observation, discussions, and assessments from the curriculum. This is important to make this connection because of the perception that is out there regarding homeschooling and students possibly not getting the same kind of education that is available to them in public school.

Most parents who homeschool noted that they use a variety of philosophies or approaches when homeschooling. Most public school teachers that I have known, including myself, also gravitate towards a variety of approaches and use what works best for the

students they are working with. This is ever changing based on where and who you are teaching. Though homeschooling parents in Alaska are generally not certified teachers, it is important to see that they are using the same philosophies that would be seen with certified teachers.

Parents who homeschool choose curriculum that will best fit their child through research and word of mouth. In the public school setting, this is more generalized, and the decision is made by a committee and then approved by the school board. The committee researches curriculum and makes a decision based on what they feel will best fit all of the students.

The majority of parents who homeschool noted that they monitor their student's progress through the curriculum. Some also noted the use of observation and discussions as the way they measure progress. In a classroom, observation is the most common assessment that I know of to have an accurate view of how a student is doing. One assessment will not give a well-rounded view of a student, so using discussions and observations during class helps a teacher follow the progress of each student.

Homeschool regulations in Alaska are minimum at best. Parents who participated in this study seem to confuse regulations for homeschool students with regulations for homeschool students in a correspondence program. Many noted that while they understand that some people take advantage of the system, they do not feel that more specific homeschool regulations would benefit the students. It was noted that more regulations could discourage parents from homeschooling, and if required to do more paperwork or such, it would take away time that could be better spent on educating their child.

By enrolling their child in a correspondence program, while the paperwork may be a hassle, the students have access to an allotment that can be used to purchase curriculum, materials, and/or attend private lessons that the parent may not be able to afford otherwise. This was noted as one of the reasons by the majority of parents that have at least one child enrolled in a correspondence program. More than half of the parents noted they like having the support from a certified teacher and felt that they were treated as a fellow educator. I am curious what the research would say if the majority of the participants were independently homeschooling. What is the reason that they do not enroll in a correspondence program, and what is the main benefit they see in homeschooling independently?

I believe more research on the topic of homeschooling in Alaska could be a benefit and give us a better view of what may need to change in the public school setting with many choosing to homeschool in Alaska. It is noted in the limited sample of this study that students who are homeschooled and enrolled in a correspondence program seem to do well on the Alaska standardized assessment. It should also be noted that though the majority of participants had a child enrolled in a correspondence program, homeschool students are not required to do so. Students can homeschool in Alaska without any oversight from the State of Alaska. Parents enjoy the freedom and flexibility that is available to them in Alaska and the regulations, or lack of, do not seem to hinder the students' education.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Homeschooling in Kodiak, Alaska: Parents Perceptions on What Is Working and What Isn't

IRB # 855475

Date Approved: May 6, 2016

Description of the Study:

This study is about homeschooling in Kodiak, Alaska. Online surveys and interviews will be used as data for this research. I will look at parents' perceptions in Alaska homeschool regulations. I will also look at what parents feel is working and what isn't in homeschooling. And finally, I will look at why parents choose to homeschool with a correspondence program. Please read this form carefully. I encourage you to ask questions about the study.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you meet these qualifications:

- You are homeschooling at least one child in Alaska.
- You live in Alaska.

If you agree to join the study, you will be asked to complete an online survey. This survey will take about 15-20 minutes to complete.

If you agree to participate in an interview, it will take about 30 minutes to complete. The interview will be recorded for use within the study. If interested, please contact Lisa Cavan or Cindy Fabbri. (See contact information below)

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Risk Statement:

- Parents who homeschool their child(ren) may be uncomfortable sharing information in fear of being looked down on or feel there is interference in how they want to school their child. However, there is no consequence for not participating. Your child(ren)'s enrollment will not be affected by your choice.

Benefit Statement:

- The potential benefit to you for taking part in this study is being able to share your thoughts on how you homeschool. You will also be able to share your opinions on state regulations. Your opinions matter and can be heard through this study.

Confidentiality:

- Any information obtained from the research will be kept confidential.
- Any information with your name attached will not be shared with anyone outside the research team.
- All research materials will be stored securely.
- We will destroy all records once the study has been completed.
- Your name will not be used in reports, presentations, and publications.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision to take part in the study is voluntary. You are free to choose whether or not to take part in the study. If you decide to participate, you can change your mind at any time and ask to be removed from the study. Your child's enrollment with AKTEACH or other correspondence school will not be affected by your choice. There is no consequence for not participating.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions, please contact:

Lisa Cavan - Teacher/Homeschool Coordinator (907) 388 – 8659 or lrcavan@alaska.edu

Dr. Cindy Fabbri – Assistant Professor of Education at UAF (907) 474 – 1558 or

cfabbri@alaska.edu

The UAF Institutional Review Board (IRB) is a group that looks at research projects that involve people. This is done to protect the people like you, involved in the research. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the UAF Office of Research Integrity (ORI). Phone: 474-7800 (Fairbanks area) or 1-866-876-7800 (toll-free outside the Fairbanks area). Email: uaf-irb@alaska.edu.

Statement of Consent:

I understand the information described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study. I am 18 years old or older. I am currently homeschooling at least one child in Alaska. I have been provided a copy of this form.

Signature of Participant & Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent & Date

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form – Within Online Survey

Homeschooling in Kodiak, Alaska: Parents Perceptions on What Is Working and What Isn't

IRB # 855475

Date Approved: May 6, 2016

Description of the Study:

This study is about homeschooling in Kodiak, Alaska. Online surveys and interviews will be used as data for this research. I will look at parents' perceptions in Alaska homeschool regulations. I will also look at what parents feel is working and what isn't in homeschooling. And finally, I will look at why parents choose to homeschool with a correspondence program. Please read this form carefully. I encourage you to ask questions about the study.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you meet these qualifications:

- You are homeschooling at least one child in Alaska
- You live in Alaska.

If you agree to join the study and give consent, please continue on to complete the online survey. This survey will take about 15-20 minutes.

If you agree to participate in an interview, it will take about 30 minutes to complete. The interview will be recorded for use within the study. If interested, please contact Lisa Cavan or Cindy Fabbri. (See contact information below)

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Risk Statement:

- Parents who homeschool their child(ren) may be uncomfortable sharing information in fear of being looked down on or feel there is interference in how they want to school their child. However, there is no consequence for not participating. Your child(ren)'s enrollment will not be affected by your choice.

Benefit Statement:

- If the participant will/may directly benefit from being in the study, add: The potential benefit to you for taking part in this study is being able to share your thoughts on how you homeschool. You will also be able to share your opinions on state regulations. Your opinions matter and can be heard through this study.

Confidentiality:

- Any information obtained from the research will be kept confidential.
- Any information with your name attached will not be shared with anyone outside the research team.
- All research materials will be stored securely.

- We will destroy all records once the study has been completed.
- Your name will not be used in reports, presentations, and publications.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision to take part in the study is voluntary. You are free to choose whether or not to take part in the study. If you decide to participate, you can change your mind at any time and ask to be removed from the study. Your child's enrollment with AKTEACH or other correspondence school will not be affected by your choice. There is no consequence for not participating.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions, please contact:

Lisa Cavan - Teacher/Homeschool Coordinator (907) 388 – 8659 or lrcavan@alaska.edu

Dr. Cindy Fabbri – Assistant Professor of Education at UAF (907) 474 – 1558 or

cfabbri@alaska.edu

The UAF Institutional Review Board (IRB) is a group that looks at research projects that involve people. This is done to protect the people like you, involved in the research. If you have questions or concerns about your rights

Statement of Consent:

I understand the information describe above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study by completing the online survey. I am 18

years old or older. I am currently homeschooling at least one child in Alaska. I have been provided a copy of this form.

By continuing to the survey, I am acknowledging that the above statement is true.

APPENDIX C

ONLINE ANONYMOUS SURVEY

1. What led you to homeschool your child(ren)?
 - a. Religious Reasons
 - b. Public school curriculum
 - c. Over testing in public schools
 - d. Common Core Standards
 - e. Other (Please specify)

2. How long have you been homeschooling?
 - a. 0-2 years
 - b. 3-5 years
 - c. 6-9 years
 - d. 10 or more years

3. Are you homeschooling with a program such as IDEA, Raven Correspondence or AKTEACH?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

If yes, what made you decide to enroll with a program?

4. What benefits do you see in homeschooling with a program, such as IDEA, Raven Correspondence or AKTEACH? Choose all that apply.
- a. Access to events or programs unavailable to others
 - b. Local certified teacher to go to with questions or concerns
 - c. Allotment available to purchase curriculum and pay for lessons such as dance or music.
 - d. Have record of school work through academic transcript with district.
 - e. Other _____ (please specify)
5. What disadvantages do you see in your child being enrolled in a correspondence program?
- a. Required standardized testing
 - b. Oversight by district
 - c. Curriculum choices
 - d. Required to follow Common Core Standards?
 - e. Other (Please specify)
6. How do you choose a curriculum for your child?
- a. Short Answer
7. What are the challenges for you/family in homeschooling?
- a. Short Answer

8. There are many philosophies or styles to homeschooling. Below are short descriptions from www.homeschool.com of the most common philosophies.

School-at-home = Many purchase a boxed curriculum that comes with textbooks, study schedules, grades, and record keeping. Looks more like traditional school, just done at home.

Charlotte Mason = Has at its core the belief that children deserve to be respected and that they learn best from real-life situations. Children are given time to play, create, and be involved in real-life situations from which they can learn. Students take nature walks, visit art museums, and learn geography, history, and literature from "living books," books that make these subjects come alive. Students also show what they know, not by taking tests, but via narration and discussion.

Classical Education = The goal is to teach people how to learn for themselves. The five tools of learning, known as the Trivium, are reason, record, research, relate, and rhetoric. Younger children begin with the preparing stage, where they learn basic reading, writing, and arithmetic. The grammar stage is next, which emphasizes compositions and collections, and then the dialectic stage, where serious reading, study, and research take place.

Unschooling = Also known as natural, interest-led, and child-led learning.

Students learn from everyday life experiences and do not use school schedules or formal lessons. Instead, unschooled children follow their interests and learn in much the same way as adults do—by pursuing an interest or curiosity.

Unit Studies = Use your child's interest and then ties that interest into subject areas like math, reading, spelling, science, art, and history. Example: Egypt – read books and write stories about Egypt, do art projects about pyramids, and learn about Egyptian artifacts & history or use mapping skills to map out a catacomb.

Eclectic or 'Relaxed Homeschooling' = Curriculum is from more than one source, using workbooks for math, reading, and spelling, and taking an unschooling approach for the other subjects. The advantage of this method is that the parent feels that the subjects they believe are most important are covered thoroughly. This method also allows the family to choose textbooks, field trips, and classes that fit their needs and interests.

How would you classify your approach to homeschooling? (You may choose more than one)

a. School-at-home

- b. Charlotte Mason
 - c. Classical Education
 - d. Unschooling
 - e. Unit Studies
 - f. Eclectic or 'Relaxed Homeschooling'
 - g. Unsure
 - h. Other _____(please specify)
9. How do you measure your child's progress or growth?
- a. Short answer
10. Do you believe there is value to students taking summative assessments, such as the SBAs or AMP? (Please select from drop down menu) (Yes or No)
- a. Comments – Please explain why
11. How do you measure your child's progress or growth?
- a. Short answer
12. Alaska's regulation on homeschooling states "If the child "is being educated in the child's home by a parent or legal guardian," the child is excepted from compulsory attendance. Under this option, there are no requirements to notify, seek approval, test, file forms, or have any teacher qualifications. The burden is on the state to prove that parents are not teaching their children.

(Alaska Stat. §14.30.010(b)(12)).

Do you think that it would benefit students to have more specific

regulations? (Please select from drop down menu) (Yes or No)

a. Comments – Please explain why

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions

The purpose of this interview is to get your feedback about homeschooling and current homeschool regulations in Alaska. We want to understand what regulations are involved and if there are changes that might need to be made.

1. It has been said that Alaska is one of the best places to homeschool. Do you agree with this statement? Why do you think so?
2. Alaska's regulation on homeschooling states "If the child "is being educated in the child's home by a parent or legal guardian," the child is excepted from compulsory attendance. Under this option, there are no requirements to notify, seek approval, test, file forms, or have any teacher qualifications. The burden is on the state to prove that parents are not teaching their children. (Alaska Stat. §14.30.010(b)(12)). What does this mean to you?
3. Do you think that it would benefit students to have more specific regulations? Why or Why not?
4. What are the advantages in homeschooling?
5. What are the disadvantages in homeschooling?
6. What do you see is the difference in homeschooling independently and homeschooling with a correspondence program such as AKTEACH, IDEA, or Raven?
7. Public school teachers are required to show accountability through the student achievement on Alaska state testing (SBAs previously, now AMP). How is there accountability in homeschool?

APPENDIX E

IRB APPROVAL LETTER



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Institutional Review Board

909 N Koyukuk Dr. Suite 212, P.O. Box 757270, Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-7270

May 6, 2016

To: Cindy Fabbri
Principal Investigator

From: University of Alaska Fairbanks IRB

Re: [855475-1] Homeschooling in Kodiak, Alaska: Parents Perceptions on What is Working and What Isn't.

Thank you for submitting the New Project referenced below. The submission was handled by Expedited Review under the requirements of 45 CFR 46.110, which identifies the categories of research eligible for expedited review.

Title:	Homeschooling in Kodiak, Alaska: Parents Perceptions on What is Working and What Isn't.
Received:	January 20, 2016
Expedited Category:	7
Action:	APPROVED
Effective Date:	May 6, 2016
Expiration Date:	May 6, 2017

This action is included on the June 8, 2016 IRB Agenda.

No changes may be made to this project without the prior review and approval of the IRB. This includes, but is not limited to, changes in research scope, research tools, consent documents, personnel, or record storage location.

APPENDIX F

IRB APPROVAL LETTER – CONTINUING REVIEW/PROGRESS REPORT



Institutional Review Board

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November 2, 2016

To: Cindy Fabbri
Principal Investigator
From: University of Alaska Fairbanks IRB
Re: [855475-2] Homeschooling in Kodiak, Alaska: Parents Perceptions on What is Working and What Isn't.

Thank you for submitting the Continuing Review/Progress Report referenced below. The submission was handled by Expedited Review under the requirements of 45 CFR 46.110, which identifies the categories of research eligible for expedited review.

Title:	Homeschooling in Kodiak, Alaska: Parents Perceptions on What is Working and What Isn't.
Received:	November 1, 2016
Expedited Category:	2
Action:	APPROVED
Effective Date:	November 2, 2016
Expiration Date:	May 6, 2017

This action is included on the December 14, 2016 IRB Agenda.

No changes may be made to this project without the prior review and approval of the IRB. This includes, but is not limited to, changes in research scope, research tools, consent documents, personnel, or record storage location.